

# Hospice provides comfort care to ill

## Work is done in patients' home or in respite facilities

BY JAN JACKSON • SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

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In West Salem's cannery district, a memorial garden sits on the grounds of Willamette Valley Hospice, and notes written to lost loved ones hang from the garden's arbor and flutter on the breeze.

The bell that hangs from an open space in the garden wall rings daily in honor of all who have died in hospice care. Inside the WVH administrative office building at 1015 3rd St., teams of nurses, physicians, ministers, social workers and volunteers meet to consult and plan how to give care and comfort to the terminally ill.

Willamette Valley Hospice began as a nonprofit organization in Salem 30 years ago by a handful of volunteers passionate about providing care for terminally ill individuals who wanted to remain in their homes. Now, about 100 staffers and more than 100 volunteers give comfort care and pain and symptom management to terminally ill patients 24 hours a day.

"We've grown a lot since I came eight years ago, and moving from our cramped space of Market Street to this property three years ago was wonderful for us," said Linda Hays, community development director for WVH.

Since the organization's work is done in patients' homes or respite facilities, the offices house only support staff, clinical and directors offices, an education board room, a reference library and conference rooms where social workers, home nurses and others can compare and discuss patient care. There are two volunteer coordinators.

"A large portion of our employees are registered nurses, medical social workers, hospice aides, spiritual and bereavement councilors, massage, music and occupational therapists who work in the field," Hays said. "We served over 1,593 hospice patients and their families last year, plus an additional 29 patients with a specialized palliative care service dedicated to pain management for patients with life limiting illnesses."

### Hospice origins

The term hospice comes from the word hospitality and dates to the Middle Ages when shelters called hospices were available to travelers who had nowhere else to stay. The hospice movement as we know it today was pioneered in the 1960s by three women who had new ways of thinking about death and dealing with dying.

British physician Dame Cicely Saunders in 1967 was the first woman to apply the term to the concept of providing specialized care to dying patients. That same year, she also founded the first modern hospice in a residential suburb of London, and during a 1973 visit to Yale University, she introduced the idea of hospice to the United States.

Several years later, Swiss-born physician and author Elisabeth Kubler-Ross brought the subject of death out of the darkness by publishing her best-selling book "On Death and Dying"; and Mother Teresa is well-known for her work among the dying destitute in Calcutta, India.

By 1974, the hospice movement had become a major health care option and the first U.S. hospice started in New Haven, Conn.

## **Volunteer support**

At the heart and backbone of the WVH program are the volunteers, who last year alone supported family members and caregivers with a total of 6,752 hours of service.

One of those volunteers is Kathy Meyer, who recently received an Oregon Hospice Association Hospice Dream Team Award for volunteer work WVH's new pet therapy program.

"I was already visiting hospice patients as a volunteer when I heard that they needed more people and dogs in the pet therapy program, and I could see that Stan would be perfect for the job," Meyer said of her mixed-breed Belgian shepherd.

"We went through a special certified Pet Therapy Training at Welcome Wagners in Corvallis who are certified tester/observers from Therapy Dogs Inc. Stan and I visit patients, and he is so laid back and sweet and loving that sometimes I have to prod him to sit up so they can see him, rather than just lay down on the floor like you would think a good dog should. However, he brings a great deal of pleasure to patients just by being there."



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Kathy Meyer, a registered nurse, volunteers for the new Willamette Valley Hospice therapy dog program with her Belgian-mix therapy dog Stan.

### **HOW TO HELP**

Volunteers provide respite care and emotional support to terminally ill patients and their caregivers. Willamette Valley Hospice offers a variety of volunteer opportunities that include:

- Respite care — relief and support for the caregiver
- Visiting patients in facilities
- Adult, children and family bereavement support
- Special events

- Clerical and outreach support
- Speaker's bureau to educate communities about hospice care benefits
- Camp Mighty Oaks summer camp
- Life review
- Pet therapy

Hospice volunteer training takes place throughout the year.

Next training session: Friday

Information: Call volunteer services at (503) 588-3600 or (800) 555-2431

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