



HOSPICE *Happenings*

Providing physical, emotional, and spiritual support to terminally ill patients and their families with free, around-the-clock registered nursing availability and trained volunteers.

Volunteer Spotlight: Betty Conger



Volunteering for hospice has long been a part of Betty Conger's life. Her journey began in the 1970s in Chester County, Pa., after her close friend Gail died. Back then, Betty, now 90, worked in retail, selling prosthetics to women who'd lost their breasts to cancer. She and Gail had vowed to one another not to ever go through the strain of treatment, but when Gail was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer, she told Betty she had to give it a try. Mary, Gail's sister-in-law, stepped in as her caretaker. After Gail died, Mary persuaded Betty to volunteer for Chester County Hospital's hospice program. Betty retired after 18 years in retail when she realized volunteering for hospice served a more important purpose than selling prosthetics.

Betty and her husband, Dick, moved to the Olympic Peninsula in 2006. When Dick began volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul Society, Betty often partnered with him on his home visits. Later, when Betty began the training for Volunteer Hospice, Dick joined her and became close friends with VHOCC founder Rose Crumb.

For VHOCC, Betty began as a respite volunteer, giving family members a chance to get away for a few hours. When COVID hit, she stepped back from respite care and turned her attention to making bereavement phone calls to families who recently have lost loved ones.

"Many people think they're doing OK, then they discover they need support," Betty says. "Some are just lonely and look forward to the call."

The second-youngest of 10 children, Betty was the first in her family to go to high school. She had dreams of becoming a nurse, but was afraid to attempt nursing school and fail, wasting her parents' hard-earned money. "Hospice has filled that void," Betty says, of not being able to pursue nursing.

Her journey with hospice took a new turn when Dick was diagnosed with ALS, better known as Lou Gehrig's disease. Betty paused her volunteer work during his illness, and in his final days, Dick was in the care of VHOCC nurses.

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Clinical Corner

Angels of Light or Dark Angels?

by Elizabeth Perez, RN, MSN, Patient Care Coordinator

When meeting new people, I often have a puzzling experience when I tell them I work for hospice. There's an abrupt change in their demeanor. Where it was comfortable familiarity or businesslike, it shifts to a quiet divide. The expression in their eyes softens and the conversation suddenly cuts off or goes something like, "Oh... thank you for your service."

It leaves me pondering what people believe a hospice nurse is. Are we angels of light or dark angels of death? Working as a medical surgical RN or rehabilitation RN, I never experienced this kind of reaction from others. Do people have such a fear of death, or are they repelled by the thought of caring for someone who is dying that it triggers confusion and then embarrassment so that they 'check out' for a few seconds? Or does my occupation trigger a very personal death experience of their own?

As nurses caring for terminally ill people, we practice skills learned in school and through years of experience. We have the privilege of teaching family members or caregivers how

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Fall/Winter Program Calendar

All in-person programs are contingent on COVID-19 guidelines and are subject to cancellation. All programs are free of charge and registration is required for all except Drop-In Grief Support. Call 360-452-1511 or email reception@vhocc.org.

COMMUNITY ORIENTATIONS

In-Person: Port Angeles

First Friday of each month, 11 a.m.–noon.

Online

First Thursday of each month, 11 a.m.–noon.

GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

In-Person Group: Port Angeles

Please contact our office for information.

In-Person Group: Sequim

Mondays, Nov. 7–Dec. 5, 1–3 p.m.

Online Group

Please contact our office for information.

DROP-IN GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

Open to those who have attended a Volunteer Hospice grief support group; no registration needed.

In-Person Group: Port Angeles

First Thursday of each month, 6:30–8 p.m.

In-Person Group: Sequim

Fourth Monday of each month, 1–2 p.m.

ONE-ON-ONE GRIEF SUPPORT

For anyone in the community grieving a loss. Call 360-406-4439 and ask for bereavement support.

SOUL CARE

SPEAKER SERIES

Our Speaker Series is offered every other month on the second Wednesday.

Wednesday, Jan. 11, 2023, noon–1:30 p.m. via Zoom:

“Honoring the Ancestors in the Grieving and Dying Process” with Daniel Foor, Ph.D.

DEATH CAFÉ 'TEA TO DIE FOR'

Open, casual, freeform discussions relating to death and dying. Offered monthly from 4–5 p.m.

Port Angeles: Fourth Wednesday of each month at the Port Angeles Senior & Community Center, 328 East 7th Street.

Sequim: Second Monday of each month at KSQM-FM, 609 Washington Street, #17.

REMEMBRANCE CEREMONY

Our fifth annual event honoring loved ones.

Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023, 2–3:30 p.m. at First Presbyterian Church, 139 W. 8th St., Port Angeles.

Message from Priya Jayadev, Our New Executive Director

I write this note on my fourth day as executive director for this amazing organization, and I'd like to take a minute to give you some perspective of why I landed where I have.



Photo by Susan Doupe

I have had the fortune to experience hospice support in the past, most meaningfully with my father's death. Hospice's focus on the prevention and relief of suffering, and improvement of the quality of end of life, made an indelible impression. Being part of this type of mission is an opportunity I could not pass up.

As I get to know VHOCC, I am realizing that our hospice is making a big difference on many fronts. We are unique in being the only non-Medicare, gratis hospice in the state. We do not deny services to those who continue to seek treatment. We provide emotional and spiritual support systems to families that extend far beyond the immediate death of a loved one. Our lending closet can be accessed by anyone in the community. And the list of our unique qualities goes on and on. VHOCC is truly a guiding light within our community.

I am excited to be a part of this organization that has been sustained for over 40 years through the deep commitment of many dedicated volunteers and staff, plus a generous community. I look forward to working to continue our progress in end-of-life care for many decades ahead!

> *Betty Conger, continued from front page*

Dick died Dec. 23, 2012, with daughter Valerie and her husband by his side, while Betty attended morning Mass. After more than 60 years of marriage, Betty was on her own.

Today, 10 years later, she is still coping with living alone after her husband's death. "We did everything together," she says. But she has found ways to adapt. As the lay Eucharistic minister of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Sequim, she administers the elements of Holy Communion to several members of the congregation unable to attend services, and she visits with them for a while.

Betty also works out three times a week and on other days walks five miles or more. "It's a good time to meditate," she says.

The biggest lesson she's learned as a hospice volunteer is to care for others, to be of service, and to enjoy the moment. She's also learned about death and accepting it. "It's something you can't put off. Prepare for it. Get your name on the waiting lists [for nursing facilities]. The wait is almost five years for some places."

As a longtime volunteer for VHOCC, she'd remind new volunteers that working with hospice isn't for everyone. "Hospice has filled a lot of voids in my life. It isn't just to be doing something. It's a lot to become a caregiver. But it has become my life."

Contributed by Heather Loyd

HOSPICE HUGS

Jim's Pharmacy Charity of the Month Program
Mount Pleasant Homemakers Club
Sequim Bay Yacht Club

Community-Sponsored Fundraisers

Denise Bennett and Sandra Tatro
Crumb Memorial Foundation
Janet Culver
Sijtze De Jong
Elisabeth Ellinger
Patricia Fisher
John Irwin
Sequim Valley Lions Club
General Fund

Clallam County Physicians Community Benefit Fund
Grant

Chestnut Cottage Restaurant
John Temple Fund

Volunteer of the Month Program

KSQM-FM Community Room
Port Angeles Senior & Community Center
Death Cafés

Mark Bonanno
Outdoor Signage

Walter Blendermann
Margaret Bourne-Raiswell
Betty Conger
Cheryl Coulter
Lyn Gilbert
Trish Holden
Lori Jacobs
Phil Lato
Debby Smith
Dan C. Welden

Volunteers with 10+ Years of Service

Volunteers of the Month

JULY: **Cecilia Stevens**, who retired after several years at the front desk. We'll miss you!



AUGUST: **Sarafina Landis**, who explains: "As a death doula, it's been special to be a part of this team and participate in many different ways. I learn a lot from passionate volunteers and people in the community. It's hopeful to see the community supported as people get more curious about death, especially in our beloved yet less accessible rural spaces."

SEPTEMBER: **Mike Kelly**, who says "I volunteer out of empathy for all those who provide care when I am not there. Being able to offer a bit of freedom and breathing space to a caregiver is very rewarding. And each person I encounter is a new chapter in the book of life."

Grateful for Hospice Volunteers

"[Volunteer] Heidi was wonderful — friendly and discreet. The medical equipment was great, so many helpful things, and [volunteer] Frank and his assistants did a fine job at delivering, setting up, and removing all of it. I am so grateful for all the workers and the volunteers."

Loretta King

> *Angels of Light, continued from front page*

to help their patient become as comfortable as possible and hopefully live their remaining days as richly as possible.

And if our patient, coming to the end of their life, is capable of describing their experience, we have the privilege of listening to them re-live important memories or review their entire lives. While administering needed comfort treatments, we often listen to their new discoveries or answer questions to help them accept what is happening.

A leaflet in our VHOCC admit packet informs, "Dying is a unique and individual journey. Each birth into this world is special in its own way. So is each death." Over and over again our nurses teach patients and caregivers how to let go, surrender, and trust the moment. At times the hospice nurse is quiet, yet always open — holding hands if it feels right, encouraging the patient or caregiver to take slow, deep breaths to help them be calm and present. Our message to the patient is to do whatever is right for them. The same goes for the caregiver: "Be who you are. Be your heart. Allow your tears, your grieving. Yet also enjoy and live the moment."

We use the phrase 'moment of death' because that is how long death lasts — just a moment. Quite often our nurses are not present at the moment of death. But we are the first to be called by the family or caregiver who was there at the last breath. And we are quickly there to help the survivors perform those final activities such as bathing and dressing the body, and calling the funeral home. Memories of these final moments can last for years afterwards and it is our privilege to help make them peaceful memories.

Sometimes, when I tell someone I am a hospice nurse, that moment of change is not one of discomfort. Instead, I can sense that it triggers a precious memory from their own lives, when they experienced the profound privilege we feel each time we comfort a person in the last days of their life.

Simply trust:
do not also the petals flutter down,
just like that?

Kobayashi Issa

Volunteer Hospice OF CLALLAM COUNTY

829 E. 8th Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362

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& Printing Services

Clinical Staff

Marca Davies, RN, MS & Elizabeth Perez, RN, MSN

Patient Care Coordinators

Haley Blackburn-Jacobs, RN, BSN

Trish Buckingham, RN

Jenn Constable, RN

Tammy Dedmore, CNA

Mary James, RN

Jeanette McKinley, CNA

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Please join our Radiant Light fundraiser in December! Honor the memory of your loved one by placing a star on our tree in our office or by donating online.

Sequim Bay Yacht Club's 2022 Reach & Row for Hospice

\$24,000 Raised for Respite Care

The September 17 and 18 weekend of races for rowers, paddlers and sailors combined with a dinner and dessert auction raised more than \$5,600 in Sequim Bay Yacht Club's most important annual fundraiser for Volunteer Hospice of Clallam County's respite care fund.

Combined with pledges for racers, quilt raffle ticket sales, tips from the yacht club's bar, and general donations, this brings the total raised so far this year by Sequim Bay Yacht Club for Volunteer Hospice to \$24,000, and the 30-year total to more than \$450,000!



Photo by Steve Segle

Pictured is 'Litonya,' skippered by Mike Kalahar, of Port Angeles — this year's Class A race winner.