

Ontario's Hospices – A Sustaining Strength

By Janet Napper, Executive Director, Hospice Association of Ontario

Every day across Ontario, miracles happen. These miracles are not the variety that change destiny, or influence the outcome of world events. Instead, they are the kind that touch hearts, bring families closer together...and help people with life threatening or terminal illness to live as fully and as comfortably as possible, and for as long as possible.

“When she was diagnosed with cancer, my mother told us that she wanted nothing more than to die at home,” says Denise Larocque of the Hospice Association of Ontario. “With only one of seven kids left at home, we were really uncertain that my father would be able to care for her. We were also really worried about how my father would cope.”

With a referral from their family physician, Denise’s family was connected with their local hospice volunteers, who in turn helped establish a whole network of professionals and organizations that came to her family’s aid.

“The relief we felt was indescribable.” she says. “With the help we received, we knew that mom would be well taken care of and that we could honour her wish to die at home. We also felt comforted that dad would get the support and help he needed. To the day he died he always said, ‘I don’t know what I would have done without the help of hospice’.”

Having first hand knowledge of how hospices help – not just the dying but the living - Denise is honoured to be able to work for the Hospice Association of Ontario.

Denise and her family are not alone in their need for hospice help. Today, more and more Ontarians find themselves in similar circumstances, trying to cope with a loved one’s life threatening illness while getting on with their own lives as best they can. And in the next 10 years, as the number of people aged 65 and older rises dramatically, the burden on families and caregivers will increase exponentially.

Most of us share a common hope – that when death comes to us or to a loved one, it will be peaceful and free of pain. We want family and friends around us. We hope to face death surrounded by those we love, feeling safe, comfortable and cared for.

But most of us also share worries about whether that will be possible. The thought of facing a life-threatening illness raises difficult questions. Could I stay at home until the end, without being a burden to my family and friends? Where else could I go? Could I get

the treatment I need to be comfortable? Who would help me and my loved ones cope? How would they live with the loss?

And if the roles were reversed, and my spouse or my parent became ill, could I manage as a caregiver? How could I possibly juggle my work, my children, and the daily care of someone I love so much? Would I have the emotional strength? The practical support?

The Hospice Association of Ontario's members have helped thousands of families across Ontario to answer these questions and resolve their fears. Ontario's hospices help terminally ill people in more than 400 communities to live at home or in a home-like setting as comfortably and as fully as possible. Hospices also care for the social, emotional and spiritual needs of families who are doing their best to look after their loved ones.

What is hospice care?

Hospice is sanctuary. The focus is on caring, not curing, and on neither hastening nor postponing death. Its goal is to make the last months of life as comfortable as is possible for patients and their caregivers, and to improve the quality of life not only for the patient, but also for family and friends.

Quality of life, family wellness, community involvement and living in dignity are all part of hospice care's compassionate and progressive vision. It is the kind of care that most Canadians – 84% according to a recent national survey – want at the end of life. But only 6% of us feel equipped to provide it for a loved one without help.

How do hospices help?

Every situation is unique, but Ontario's hospices have provided respite care and emotional and spiritual support to

- The husband of a young mother faced with terminal breast cancer who is overwhelmed by the daily routine of work, caring for children and preparing meals, along with the very difficult issues of anger, loss and anxiety about the future
- The middle-aged woman juggling family and career who wants to help her widowed mother live out her life in the community despite a disabling disease, or whose own husband is faced with a life-threatening diagnosis
- The elderly man facing terminal illness who wants to stay home, but whose wife is also frail and unable to cope
- The single mother whose child is terminally ill and who faces making a choice between continuing her employment or staying home to take care of her child

Hospice volunteers are a part of an interdisciplinary team which includes the entire family, physicians, nurses, social workers, occupational therapists and spiritual counselors. Care is provided at home and in specialized facilities, hospitals and nursing homes. While approximately 70% of people receiving hospice care are seriously or terminally ill with cancer, hospices look after people of all ages and with all types of illnesses.

About the Hospice Association of Ontario

The Hospice Association of Ontario began in 1989 with eight founding members. Today, more than 85 hospices belong to the Association. In 400 communities in Ontario, some 12,000 volunteers dedicate more than 570,000 to help people and their families.

Since 1989, the Hospice Association of Ontario has become Canada's largest volunteer hospice organization. And Ontario's hospices have become the largest direct service providers within the province's voluntary health care sector.

What services do hospices provide?

Hospice care means caring for the whole person, and for their family. A hospice program may include the following elements.

Emotional Support

Providing sensitive listening and non-judgmental discussion are the most basic and important of hospice volunteer support skills. This support can include

- encouraging clients to take active roles in their own care
- acting as an advocate by ensuring the clients' wishes are respected
- sharing an activity, holding a hand or giving a hug
- discussing illness openly, taking cues for discussion from the client

Respite Care

Caring for an ill person is both a rewarding and a difficult and draining experience – emotionally and physically. In addition to providing a “friendly ear” to caregivers, having a hospice volunteer in the home also means that caregivers can take some time off and take care of themselves.

Bereavement Support

All hospices provide some form of bereavement support to families. Hospice volunteers assist clients through the grieving process and, when requested, help family members to access other community support associations.

Spiritual Support

Spiritual support within hospice care grows out of recognition of the sacred aspect of life and death. Clients are supported in their search for spirituality regardless of their approach or faith.

Collaboration and Coordination with Other Agencies

One of the most important parts of the hospice philosophy is the emphasis on building an interdisciplinary team. Hospices of all sizes have been extremely successful at developing and coordinating collaborative services with other community agencies, including nursing and home care agencies, pain specialists, hospitals and physicians and other organizations such as community ALS and cancer societies.

FACTS:

- Although there are 650 hospice palliative care organizations in Canada, only one in 10 dying Canadians is currently supported by hospice palliative care. That means that thousands of family members have no support whatsoever.
- Although 84% of Canadians strongly agree that it is important for terminally ill patients to be able to spend their final days in comfort and familiar surroundings, only 6% of Canadians believe they would be able to provide this support without outside help.
- Today, two out of five people over the age of 30 will care for someone in their home at some time in their lives.

If you or someone you know needs the help of a hospice or to find out how you can help please call 416-304-1477 or 1-800-349-3111. Or contact us at Hospice Association of Ontario, 27 Carlton Street, Suite 201, Toronto, Ontario M5B 1L2, info@hospice.on.ca; www.hospice.on.ca.

COMMUNITIES SERVED BY HOSPICE ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO MEMBERS

Adolphustown	Buchin	Echo Bay	Hampton
Ahmic Harbour	Buckhorn	Eganville	Harcourt
Ajax	Burk's Falls	Egypt	Harmony Bay
Algoma	Burlington	Elliot Lake	Hartsmere
Algona South	Byron	Elmira	Hastings
Township	Cache Bay	Embro	Havelock
Amherstview	Caesaria	Elmvale	Havilland Bay
Apsley	Caledon	Emsdale	Hawkesville
Ashburn	Callander	Englehart	Haysville
Asphadel Township	Cambridge	Enniskillen	Heidelberg
Atikokan	Camden East	Ennismore	Hepworth
Aurora North	Campbellford	Erinsville	Hermon
Aurora South	Cannington	Espanola	Hesson
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Bamberg	Cardiff	Essex County	Hillsdale
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Baptiste Village	Carnarvon	Floradale	Hope
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Bath	Chapleau	Fort Stewart	Hybla
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Beamsville	Chatsworth	Frontenac	Innerkip
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Bellhaven	Claremont	Georgina Island	Katrine
Belmont Township	Clarington	Georgina	Kawartha Lakes
Bicroft	Clinton	Geraldton	Kearney
Bird=s Creek	Cobalt	Gilmour	Kearns
Blackstock	Cobden	Glen Morris	Kemptville
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Bolton	Colborne	Goodwood	Kent County
Boulter	Coldwater	Goulais Bay	Keswick
Bowmanville	Collingwood	Goulais River	Kettleby
Bracebridge	Columbus	Grafton	King City
Bradford	Conestogo	Gratton Township	King Township
Brampton	Corbeil	Green River	Kingston
Breslau	Cornwall	Greenview	Kirkland Lake
Bridgenorth	Courtice	Greenwood	Kitchener
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Lions Head	Northbrook	Roblin	Thunder Bay
Listowel	North Dumfries	Roseville	Tillsonburg
London	North York	Ross Township	Timiskaming Distric
Longlac	Northumberland	Rutherglen	Tobermory
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Manitouwadge	Northumberland	Sauble Beach	Trenton
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Maynooth	Omeme	Searchmont	Uxbridge
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McKerrow	Orillia	Township	Vaughan
Merrickville	Ormsby	Sebright	Verner
Millband	Oro-Medonte	Sebringville	Vespra Township
Millbrook	Orono	Selby	Victoria County
Milton	Oshawa	Severn Bridge	Virgil
Milverton	Ottawa	Shakespeare	Virginia
Minden	Oxford County	Sharon	Virginiatown
Mississauga	Oxford-on-Rideau	Simcoe	Walford Station
Mitchell	Township	Sioux Lookout	Wallaceburg
Monkton	Parry Sound	South Algona	Warkworth
Monteagle Valley	Paudash	Township	Warsaw
Montrose West	Pefferlaw	South Gower	Waterloo Region
Moonstone	Pembroke	Township	Waubauskene
Mount Albert	Penetanguishene	South River	Webbwood
Muskoka North	Perth	Sprucedale	Welland
Muskoka South	Peterborough	St. Agatha	Wellesley
Nairn Centre	Peterburg	St. Catharines	Wellesley East
Napanee	Pettawa	St. Clements	Township
Nestleton	Pickering	St. Davids	Wellington County
New Carlow	Picton	St. Jacobs	Weslemkoon
Newburgh	Plattsville	St. Joseph=s Island	Westmeath
Newcastle	Port Bolster	St. Marys	Township
New Dundee	Port Colborne	St. Ola	Whitby
New Hamburg	Port Hope	Steenburg	White River
New Liskeard	Port Loring	Stirling	Whitefish Falls
Newmarket	Port Perry	Stouffville	Whitevale
Newtonville	Powassan	Stratford	Warton
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