

## Why I'm a hospice nurse

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I was paralyzed with polio at the age of 7 in 1955. When at the age of 41 it was time for a career change, I recalled with thanksgiving all the care my mother, my nurses and the physical therapists at the March of Dimes gave me. With God as the source of all healing, He was able to use these dedicated ones to tend to my own healing. Thank you, Lord! Thank you, Mother! and thanks to all who care for the injured, infirm, ill and dying.

From that memory it was not hard to consider enrolling in nursing school, so Indian Hills Community College, Ottumwa was the place to be for the next two years. Being one of six men in a class of 125 certainly opened my eyes to the way women think, feel and respond to the plight of the ill! What a wonderful education I received from all my classmates as well as from the formal instruction.

I'm also thankful for the nursing program where they gave us students very practical nursing experiences in a variety of settings. When I observed the special compassion of the hospice nurse I followed those weeks - and I regret forgetting her name - I told myself, "this is the kind of nursing I hope to do someday."

After 12 years of experience in other areas of nursing, including seven in intensive care, I was hired this last summer as a new staff nurse at Hospice of Washington County. (This is really a misnomer as we provide services to 6 surrounding counties as well as our own, but the original vision was more local so we continue to honor that name to this day.)

"I don't think I could take care of dying people," is the response I hear most from other nurses and just about anyone else who asks, "...and what do you do?" After all, our culture's doctoring, nursing and "hospitalling" focuses on healing and health, not death and dying! I simply respond that I believe that this work is a calling. Though few ask "what is a calling?" to me this calling is not unlike the one Mother Teresa received. That is not to say that the hospice

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movement in the United States mirrors or matches Mother Teresa! Rather than the Lord makes provision for those in need - and I am just one small part of the whole of His work.

So, what then is the essence of this calling? When the rest of the medical community discerns in the case of any given patient that "...there is nothing more we can do..." to help with the healing or curing process there remains what is called palliative care. This is the kind of care we give so that a terminally ill person can maintain as active a life as possible for as long as possible. Or, as they decline toward death - however quickly or slowly their disease dictates - that that decline and the family's coping with it is supported from the outside - by those who know how and when to help.

Our email address at Hospice of Washington County states our mission best: [dignity@lisco.com](mailto:dignity@lisco.com)! As a dying person and his or her family faces an uncertain future there are many ways we know to help that process become and remain a process full of dignity, respect and as pain-free as possible. Dignity graced with reality, truth and a sprinkling of laughter amongst the tears.

That is how I wish to die - whether of a terminal illness or in some other way - with dignity and truth! Thus am I called to provide for others in the same way.

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