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## Hospice staff, volunteers 'there for the patient'

Alison Bunting Times-News Correspondent  
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Colleen Shoemaker, a certified nursing assistant at WVU Medicine Potomac Valley Hospital hospice, assists a patient with in-home care.

Alison Bunting/Times-News Correspondent



KEYSER, W.Va. — Hospice can be challenging for home health care workers, but the job also can be fulfilling.

”People think that hospice is daunting, all doom and gloom,” said Holly Haines, who holds a master’s degree in human and social services and is a licensed social worker in West Virginia.

“But none of us knows when our time is up. I could die before they do,” she said.

Hospice, based at WVU Medicine Potomac Valley Hospital, offers “end of life care” to patients and their families, Haines said.

Her role is to make sure the needs of the patients are met, keeping all the entities working, which includes coordinating volunteers.

Joshua Miller, an ordained minister who serves as spiritual care coordinator for hospice, works with Haines. Besides everyday tasks, they conduct a support group for the bereaved.

Miller said he likes to develop a rapport with patients, offering spiritual and emotional support, scripture, prayer, or “sometimes singing upon request.”

“I like coming into the home and helping out, and being there for the patient,” said Colleen Shoemaker, a certified nursing assistant for hospice.

Her most challenging day is when she sees a combative patient, she said.

Shoemaker's duties include bathing the patient, changing bandages and floor pads, preparing meals, house cleaning, laundry or lifting the patient to transfer to another location.

Megan Robinette, a registered nurse case manager, said most of the patients she sees, as many as five or six daily, have heart or lung diseases.

Her job involves taking "vitals," such as blood pressure, oxygen levels, temperature and heart rate. She also manages medication that hospice provides for pain, nausea or anxiety.

"Jesus teaches us to love our neighbor," said Carol Atmower of Burlington, who volunteers with hospice as part of her local church membership. "I believe we should be there for them," she said.

Gwen Wolford, New Creek, said she started as a hospice volunteer 20 years ago when her mother died.

Back then hospice was conducted in hospitals, not in the home, Wolford said. The Keyser hospital didn't offer hospice, so patients were taken to Sacred Heart Hospital in Cumberland.

Care workers and family members traveled to see the patients, Wolford said, noting that she made a lot of lifelong friends this way.