

FAMILY

to Family

MEANINGFUL

Melodies

INSIDE:

Hoops for Hospice • Bereavement Distinguishes Hospice Care



Family Hospice
Part of UPMC

Dear Friends,



For so many of those under our care, one of the difficult aspects of serious illness, caregiving, and loss is isolation. It can be hard to relate to another's experience, or even have the energy to do so, when one's own daily reality is impacted by these things. Because of your support, Family Hospice has so much to lend to easing the physical, mental, and emotional toll that isolation can take on both our patients and their families.

Isolation can be particularly acute when separated by time and distance in a period of crisis. Thanks to a grant from the Snee-Reinhardt Charitable Foundation, patients and caregivers have a new tool which allows them to connect with staff visually and immediately at critical times. It also provides practical, educational resources to help bolster caregiver confidence, accessible in real time. Learn more on page one.

By bringing music to the bedside, volunteers and local musicians evoke positive responses and connections in a way that other clinical interventions cannot. They can also enhance the effectiveness of medical interventions by instilling calm and relaxation. Meet some of our contributors to that effort on pages two and three.

Bereavement aftercare for family members and caregivers who have suffered loss is so impactful, and Family Hospice has long been a leader in this regard. Our bereavement staff are in touch with thousands of people annually, near and far, to address the sense of loneliness that can accompany loss, both for families under our care and for the larger community. Our story starts on page four.

Imagine being rejected by your biological family. Imagine that you are unable to advocate for your critically ill spouse or partner. These are familiar, isolating experiences for those who identify as LGBTQIA+. Thanks to funding from The Beckwith Institute, Family Hospice helped present an educational forum designed to educate and empower members of the LGBTQIA+ community as well as health care providers regarding advance care planning for this population. Details are on page five.

The mission of providing compassionate, quality care to hospice patients and their families begins with being present. It's not enough to say, "You are not alone." As these pages attest, that sentiment finds its true expression in the actions of our staff, our volunteers, and our benefactors. Thank you for your contribution to this important work.

Gratefully,
Jennifer Vennare
President, Family Hospice

MAKING *Timely* CONNECTIONS

Time with our loved ones is precious, and when it comes to their care, answers and help need to come quickly.

Hospice patients at home have the benefit of being in a familiar setting surrounded by people and objects they love, but sometimes distance poses challenges. To support timely care, Family Hospice, with a generous grant from the Snee-Reinhardt Charitable Foundation, is incorporating Apple iPad tablets as a tool in caring for patients at the end of life.

"We are grateful beyond words for the Snee-Reinhardt Charitable Foundation's generosity," comments Elena Nosal, director, Regional Hospice Services. "Our shared focus on the vital importance of remote and rural health care has enabled us to create a program that offers immediate care at critical times and eases the minds of our patients and families."

Tablets will provide instant connectivity to triage nurses, care teams, and other resources to bridge distance and time until

staff can arrive for an in-person visit. They can be preloaded with helpful information pertaining to a patient's diagnosis, videos and instructions for caregivers on how to change a bed, bathe a patient, and perform other tasks to provide comfort, as well as links to legal documents such as POA (Power of Attorney), Healthcare POA, and POLST (Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment) so families have the tools necessary to enact their loved one's wishes. After use, tablets will be collected, cleaned, and updated as necessary for the next patient.

Elena explains, "This grant exemplifies the priority we are placing on patient access to timely care, education, and support. As a leader in the provision of hospice care, we strive to find ways to adapt to patients' needs to bolster convenience, accessibility, and caregiver confidence."



Family Hospice
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CELEBRITY HOOPS FOR HOSPICE THURSDAY, OCT. 19, 2023 North Allegheny High School

6-7 p.m. Students vs Faculty • 8-9 p.m. Celebrity Game

**CHEER ON PENGUINS, PIRATES, AND STEELERS ALUMNI,
PITTSBURGH PASSION, AND MORE**

Proceeds benefit the complimentary children's bereavement programs of Family Hospice.

WATCH TWO GAMES FOR ONE PRICE

There will be free autographs, halftime shot contests, sports-themed raffles, and more.

**ADULT TICKETS: \$20 • STUDENT TICKETS: \$10
UPMC Urgent Care VIP Pass: \$20**

A UPMC Urgent Care VIP Pass permits guests to move to the front of the autograph line. Only 30 UPMC Urgent Care VIP Passes will be sold.

For questions, contact Dianne Whetsell at 412-572-8874 or email whetsell@upmc.edu.

[UPMC.com/FamilyHospiceDonate](https://www.upmc.com/FamilyHospiceDonate)

Morgan Sennett and Kyle Pattison



MEANINGFUL *Melodies*

Volunteers Bring Music to the Bedside

Music reaches beyond words to communicate. With the support of volunteers and programs like “Music Smiles,” Family Hospice forges healing connections through sound and music.

The desire to share music with others is a strong drive for Kyle Pattison, who volunteers at the Family Hospice inpatient unit in Lawrenceville. Kyle plays the guitar for the patients, but he also dabbles in playing piano.

“It’s an important practice and experience to play at Family Hospice for the guests and staff,” says Kyle. The idea of volunteering in a hospice setting was something he had been interested in pursuing when he found Family Hospice had a volunteer program which included musicians.

Kyle begins his visits to the inpatient unit by asking the staff who among current guests would be open to this experience. Typically, Kyle plays for the patient one-on-one, setting a peaceful atmosphere in his choice of music. “I really enjoy my time volunteering,” says Kyle. “The nurses are extremely kind and amazing people.”

The feeling is mutual for the staff at the inpatient unit. Erin Bernhardt, inpatient unit manager, says, “Kyle’s music complements other interventions and creates a holistic environment for the patients.”

This proves a transformative time for Kyle. “Music connects me to others when I don’t have the words. I see comfort in patients’ faces,” observes Kyle. “Music allows people to relax.”

“Music Smiles”

The healing power of music is something Annie Pugar, of The Sonny Pugar Memorial, Inc., believes in so strongly that she created a program called “Music Smiles.” This program connects local musicians with health care facilities for the purpose of live performance.



Ron Soltis

“It’s all about bringing people into a peaceful mindset. The music is almost like medicine.”

Annie’s husband was a local musician and toured with bands until he was diagnosed with stage 4 colon cancer. After her husband’s death, Annie held a benefit concert and donated the money to a music therapy program. From there, “Music Smiles” was born. Based on her personal experiences in health care settings, she wanted music to play a bigger role in care and in providing a mental and emotional break for patients and caregivers.

Annie says, “Over the years, Family Hospice has cared for my family members, and I am so thankful for them; they have guided me through to the very end. So, it is thrilling every time we can send musicians to Family Hospice via ‘Music Smiles.’”

This happens regularly, and Annie takes care to schedule performances around Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Christmas, Thanksgiving, and the winter holidays. She schedules performances for both the inpatient unit and for individuals receiving care at home.

Annie receives grateful letters with photos and phone calls, all expressing how meaningful and moving the music is to patients and families. She says, “It is so important to think

about something happy during difficult times. ‘Music Smiles’ is about lifting people’s spirits and allowing them to enjoy the moment. One family member described it as magic.”

Such magical moments would not be possible without the artists themselves. Ron Soltis is among the local musicians who play for Family Hospice patients and families regularly. He had been a musician for 50 years, playing guitar, harmonica, and piano. He also sings. Ron enjoys all genres of music and plays based on the expressed preference of patients. He often spends more than the allotted hour when playing in the hospice setting.

He says, “It’s all about bringing people into a peaceful mindset. The music is almost like medicine.”

Ron attests to the spiritual, healing powers of music. “It is great to be able to play for the hospice patients,” says Ron. “Although it may seem strange to say I enjoy it, I really do because I can give some relief. Unlike in other performances, if a hospice patient relaxes enough to fall asleep, it is a nice compliment to me.”

If you would like to learn more about volunteering with Family Hospice, please contact Nick Petti at 412-651-1602.

Bereavement DISTINGUISHES HOSPICE CARE

Bereavement support is defined as a core service of the Medicare Hospice benefit. This speaks to a tenet of the hospice philosophy which includes the family in the circle of care. It is not unusual for health care providers to engage Family Hospice expressly for the emotional support offered to family members which extends beyond the life of the patient. Regardless of whether a patient receives care for a day or for a year, bereavement services are available for 13 months after death, and hospice is the only model of care to do so.

Family Hospice has a long history of providing expert counseling and outreach from trained staff and volunteers. Annually, offerings which include individual counseling, services of remembrance, educational outreach, support groups, and material resources reach more than 3,000 families and community members locally and nationally.

As COVID-19 moves from its pandemic to endemic phase and in-person bereavement outreach resumes, experts at Family Hospice are attending to people experiencing a kind of delayed grief that finds an outlet for expression in the array of interventions and supports which include a social component.

Services of Remembrance

After a three-year pause on gathering, in-person memorial services have resumed across communities served by Family Hospice. These “Services of Remembrance” provide the opportunity for family members who have lost a loved one to gather with hospice staff in reflection and fellowship and hope.

Jennifer Cox, bereavement coordinator, says, “Services of Remembrance are important events for our hospice families. They not only honor and remember their loved one during the service, but they are able to see how deeply their loved one touched the lives of the hospice team members and volunteers.”

Grief Support Groups

Trained volunteers Anne-Marie Shields and Diane Stol run a long-established monthly bereavement support group at Southminster House in Mt. Lebanon. As Anne-Marie describes it, “We are able to provide a safe and confidential environment for people to talk, listen, and be with others who are going through something similar.”

As an open group, participants can attend as they need. “Grief is not one size fits all,” Diane explains. “But we do see that coming to a group and hearing from others who are further along in their grief journey proves therapeutic.”

Growing Through Grief

“Growing Through Grief” is a six-week class for the recently bereaved. It is intended to

assist individuals in moving through the grief process by teaching coping skills, determining grief triggers, and normalizing feelings. Additionally, the class promotes peer support to mitigate loneliness.

Betsy McCrann, bereavement coordinator, facilitated the first post-pandemic class in the spring. As she observed, “These sessions created an almost immediate bond among the participants. Even after the first few sessions, they were meeting for coffee to continue the conversation.”

“Growing Through Grief” is funded by donor support. The next class gets underway in October at UPMC St. Margaret. Interested parties can call 412-572-8829 for more information and to register.

Betsy notes that bereaved persons may avail themselves of any number of offerings. Barbara Berchok participated in the “Cooking for One” classes which focus on meal planning, meal preparations, and cooking as well as the emotional and mental challenges that come after a loss. She then enrolled in the “Growing Through Grief” program.



“Family Hospice has provided extraordinary help to me during a painful time. They gave me a hand to hold and opportunities to connect with others who are grieving. I have attended three different bereavement offerings since my husband’s death, and I am still in touch with people who I met through these programs. It’s powerful to see how we are truly growing through our grief.”

~ Barbara Berchok

SUPPORTING THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

Family Hospice, part of UPMC, is engaged in a concerted, large-scale effort to address the needs and values of marginalized groups. Along with colleagues from UPMC Home Healthcare, the UPMC Palliative and Supportive Institute, and The Beckwith Institute, Family Hospice is taking a population health approach by reaching out to groups with different lived experiences who may find themselves on the fringe of access to health care.

A recent example is “Just Talk About It,” an advance care planning forum supporting the LGBTQIA+ community, held earlier this year at UPMC Health Plan’s Neighborhood Center in East Liberty. More than 100 people participated in this panel discussion which included experts from faith-based, legal, clinical, psycho-social, and community perspectives. The audience was comprised of both members of the community and providers.

Advance care planning is the process by which an individual identifies a health care decision maker to speak on their behalf should they become unable to do so during a serious illness or event. Additionally, it includes treatment preferences so that a person’s wishes are defined and honored. In the absence of advance care planning, an individual may be left with someone making decisions about their care who does not know or share their values. In fact, studies indicate that when left to guess regarding treatment preferences, decision makers and providers do so incorrectly one-third of the time.

Why is this topic so resonant for the LGBTQIA+ community? Eric Horwith, LSW, regional manager, business development, Family Hospice, is also an adjunct professor of health policy, diversity, and inclusion at the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Social Work. He explains, “Research shows discrimination against those who identify as LGBTQIA+. These individuals also tend to be ostracized or flat out rejected by their families of origin. And they tend to suffer health disparities at an increased rate over their peers who do not identify as LGBTQIA+. All this factors in to how people receive care and how they make decisions about their health care.”

The topic resonates with providers as well. One physician who participated in the forum expressed that at times he is uncertain about broaching the issue of sexual identity with patients, fearing it may be intrusive. Given the identified challenges for this population, discussion weighed in favor of the benefits of doing so and addressed approaches to creating a safe space in that regard.

The forum was made possible by funding from The Beckwith Institute. Led by founders Nick and Dorothy Beckwith, the Institute remains a staunch advocate for innovative solutions, informed decision making, and mitigating disparities in health care.

Family Hospice continues to seek and provide opportunities for engagement and education commensurate with its commitment to support all people with dignity, representation, and compassion.



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Please direct questions, comments, and/or requests to **Christine Jamison**, Director of Development, at **412-572-8812** or **jamisonc2@upmc.edu**.

Go Green! If you would prefer to receive your copy of our newsletter via e-mail, contact **Helen Stickney**, Development Assistant and Donor Database Manager, at **412-572-8457** or **stickneyhe@upmc.edu**.



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*In Remembrance
and Love*



Holiday Memorial Doves

Join our long-standing tradition of remembering a loved one with a dove this season. We have a number of ways and levels by which to participate.

Holiday Dove Trees will be up at designated locations beginning **Nov. 14**. Learn more at **UPMC.com/FamilyHospiceDonate**.

For questions or orders, please contact Dianne Whetsell at 412-572-8874 or whetselld@upmc.edu.

Proceeds benefit patient care, fund programs, and educate the community about the benefits of hospice care.

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