

# An Introduction to Palliative Care

By: Glen Varns, MD, Medical Director, Allina Health Palliative Care

There were 4,300 palliative care consultations performed at Allina Health's five metro hospital sites in 2017. At any given time there are more than 100 patients receiving palliative care during a hospital stay, and more than 200 patients in Allina Health's home-based community palliative care program. Despite these statistics, palliative care is not familiar to most people until they or a loved one require the care. Dr. Glen Varns, the Medical Director of Allina Health Palliative Care, helps explain what palliative care is.



**Q: What is palliative care and who is eligible?**

A: Palliative care is comprehensive treatment that is directed toward improving the quality of life of a person with serious illness. We consider "treatment" to mean anything that improves the patient's quality of life, including medicines, procedures and surgeries, but also counseling, spiritual support and help with decision making. When we say "serious illness," it means any illness that makes a significant impact on quality of life, length of life or physical function. Allina Health has a large palliative care program, with 11 physicians and more than 20 other providers including nurse practitioners, chaplains, social workers and nurses. These teams of providers work in a variety of care settings, from hospitals to clinics to home settings

**Q: What is the connection/relationship to hospice?**

A: The best explanation is that hospice is a KIND of palliative care for people with terminal illnesses. In America, when a person has a serious illness that limits their expected survival to six months or less, that person is usually eligible for home-based palliative care that we call "hospice." Typically, when a person is in hospice care, the way that we help improve their quality of life is by focusing on symptom control, acknowledging that while their disease may not be curable, there is always something that can be done to help them feel better.

**Q: Does Allina Health's palliative care program have any advantages in comparison to other programs?**

A: One of the main advantages that Allina Health Palliative Care has is that we are part of a large and well-integrated health system. We benefit from using a common electronic medical record and from being well-aligned with our hospital and clinic partners. We are also very fortunate that our senior leadership, including Dr. Penny Wheeler, are extraordinarily supportive of the idea of palliative care, because they realize that it is crucial to our goal of providing whole person care.

**Q: How do people access palliative care and do they pay for it?**

A: Many of our patients access palliative care during a serious health event like a hospitalization, with a consultation in the hospital. Other patients are referred to palliative care clinics or palliative home care by their doctors. Hospital and clinic-based palliative care are usually covered by insurance because they are specialty consultations, just like a referral to other medical specialties. Home-based palliative care is becoming more commonly covered by insurance in some parts of the country, but benefits are often limited to a certain length of time.

**Q: Where do you see palliative care heading in the future? Is there a strong pipeline of physicians for this area of care? Does that impact the level of care that will be provided?**

A: The future of palliative care lies in partnering with our colleagues, in primary care and specialty care, to help identify patients with serious illness earlier in the course of their disease. When we identify patients earlier, it helps us have better conversations with patients about what really best supports their quality of life, and it helps patients make decisions that are really in line with what matters most to them. In turn, the medical providers that have these conversations, and engage in palliative care throughout the course of their patient's illness, are more satisfied with the care they provide.

**Q: What do you want people to know about palliative care?**

A: Our biggest challenge in palliative care is to dispel the myths surrounding it. Many people believe that palliative care is the same thing as "surrendering" to an illness, or that it's all about dying. The truth is that palliative care is about life – abundant, vibrant life. Our job is helping people live the best lives that they can, according to their goals and values.

For more information about Allina Health Palliative Care, visit [allinahealth.org/palliative](http://allinahealth.org/palliative), call 651-635-9173, or talk with your primary care provider.

Allina Health  
HOSPICE  
FOUNDATION

3915 Golden Valley Road  
Minneapolis, MN 55422

612-775-2550

[hospicefoundation@allina.com](mailto:hospicefoundation@allina.com)  
[allinahealth.org/hospicefoundation](http://allinahealth.org/hospicefoundation)

## Shared Journeys

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Allina Health Hospice

**Blizzard Blast**

Charity Event

**Friday, Jan. 25, 2019**

**5:30 p.m.**

**give**  
TO THE  
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**NOV. 15, 2018**

Join us for the great  
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[allinahealth.org/HospiceFoundationMAX](http://allinahealth.org/HospiceFoundationMAX)

# Shared Journeys

A PUBLICATION OF THE ALLINA HEALTH  
HOSPICE FOUNDATION | FALL 2018

## A Better Way of Saying Goodbye



*“There is no greater trust than to give over the care of a loved one, when to do so means to acknowledge one’s own limits and weaknesses,”* Mary Christenson first wrote to Allina Health Hospice back in May regarding the care provided for her mother, Betty. The decision to move a loved one into hospice care is never an easy one, and was especially difficult for the family of Betty Christenson. Mary confessed that she and her family were initially reluctant to transfer her mother’s care to Allina Health Hospice and wondered if it was the right decision at the time. However, as various doctors and nurse practitioners encouraged Betty’s family to consider hospice care, Mary realized it was in her mother’s best interests to move forward with Allina Health.

Mary and her family soon experienced how Allina Health Hospice was committed to providing the best care for Betty, even in the smallest of ways. For instance, Betty was very particular about when she showered and got her hair styled, and wanted that to be a part of her regular routine. So Jessica, part of Betty’s shower team, made sure to wash Betty’s hair on specific days and at specific times in order to best meet Betty’s expectations. This reliable, consistent and genuine caregiving played a significant role in Betty’s experience with hospice. “When Jessica walked in on Mondays and Thursdays, [Betty] would just light up” Mary noted. This held true for everyone on Betty’s hospice team including those who provided Betty’s primary hospice care, music therapy and massage therapy. “Little did we know how much you all would love our mother, and little did we know how much we would love all of you at Allina,” Mary

Mary and Betty

*Continued on page 4*



# Feeding Wedum Families



*Since its opening in 2012, J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice has been committed to helping families who are going through the difficult process of losing a loved one. Allina Health Hospice wanted to further support its patients and their families in a completely new and meaningful way.*

Until recently, the residential hospice has not been able to provide meals to its patients' families during a time when they would rather stay with their loved ones than have to leave to get food. With the year-long support of a grant from The Randy Shaver Cancer Research and Community Fund, this changed at the beginning of 2018. With this support the Food for Families Fund was created with a mission of feeding the many families that spend countless hours and days with their loved ones residing at J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice.

Roseann Giovanatto-Shaver, the Executive Director of The Randy Shaver Cancer Research and Community Fund, shared her own personal connection and motivation in making the Food for Families fund possible. "When touring J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice, we noticed that families that were visiting family members were relegated to bringing their own food while visiting or staying with their family member or dear friend in hospice. Additionally, healthy options or restaurants were not available near the facility, so folks were running out and eating fast food. The process left us feeling sad and we wanted to make their stay with their loved one a time for them to visit, share stories and not worry where they should go for their next meal or who should be the person within the family to prepare food for everyone."

This thoughtful and caring service addition has not gone unnoticed at the facility. "Since its inception we have received numerous notes from folks that have had family members at J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice and have enjoyed the meals provided by The Randy Shaver Cancer Research and Community Fund prepared by their amazing chef," explained Roseann. "In addition to caring for patients, nurses now have a new way of bonding with families by sharing the daily home-cooked meal available to them," Roseann further noted.

While this is the first year the Food for Families Fund has been in place, it has already made a significant impact in the lives of family members with loved ones at Wedum. Numerous family members have commented on the meals. One such family member, Mary Ellen said, "What a wonderful gift to have a warm meal during this difficult time – delicious and so appreciated." It is with this encouragement, that families and employees hope to see this fund receive support for years to come so that J.A. Wedum can continue to provide the care and comfort that both patients and their families deserve.

Would you like to help support the Food for Families fund? To do so, contact Leslie Johnson at **612-803-9014** or give online at [allinahealth.org/hospicefoundationgivenow](http://allinahealth.org/hospicefoundationgivenow).

## Legacy Giving and Making a Difference

*Ron Bagnall, Senior Development Officer, Allina Health Hospice Foundation*

The names of Abraham Lincoln, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa are immediately recognizable as champions of the oppressed, poor, and elderly. The name John Peterson is not likely to be recognized as one, especially in Minnesota where Scandinavian names abound.

*What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead. – Nelson Mandela*

John "Jack" Peterson was born in Minneapolis on January 6, 1934. He graduated from Central High School in 1952. Jack was a hard worker; as a young lad, he had a paper route and cleaned floors at Sandberg's Bakery. At the age of 19, he was drafted into the Army. When he returned home, Jack worked as a Master Plumber until retiring in 1997. When Jack was 37, he married Judy Lindblom, and they made their home in Eden Prairie until she died of ALS in 2003 while being care for by Allina Health Hospice.

Jack died on May 20, 2017. His obituary read: "Jack was generous and always willing to help. If you ever met him, you would not forget him." Unfortunately,

I never meet Jack, but I won't forget him. When Jack completed his estate plans, he included a bequest to the Allina Health Hospice Foundation in appreciation for the loving care that our hospice team provided Judy.

I wish I could have had a few minutes with Jack to share how his generosity will provide comfort and dignity to so many of our hospice patients and to offer a simple thank you. Jack represents the hard-working men and women of this nation who quietly served their country as well as their community. They aren't looking for recognition; their joy comes in helping others. Thank you, Jack, for caring and blessing others!

Jack's legacy gift and others like his have comforted many hospice patients by providing music and massage therapy or helping with the room and board expenses at the JA Wedum Residential Hospice in Brooklyn Park and the Homestead Hospice House in Owatonna, expenses that are not covered by Medicare.

If you're interested in leaving a legacy and making a difference, please consider including the Allina Health Hospice Foundation in your will or estate plan. For more information, go to our webpage or contact me at **612-775-2585** or [ron.bagnall@allina.com](mailto:ron.bagnall@allina.com).

## Why I give: Todd Hutson

*Allina Health Hospice Foundation Board Member*



Todd Hutson

### How long have you served on the Allina Health Hospice board?

I was elected to the board in August 2017, so just over one year. I have learned so much about the health care industry and the import work that Allina Health Hospice does for our community. Ron Bagnall and my family have known each other for more than 10 years. My family and I attended the Dragonfly Gala for many years prior to me joining the board, so I was familiar with this activity of Allina Hospice.

### Why do you give to Allina Health Hospice Foundation?

My step mom passed away more than 10 years ago. We needed hospice care for her in her final days but there were no open beds at any facilities in the Twin Cities, so home hospice was our only option. From this event, my father and family got involved with the J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice facility building project. After seeing what we were able to do, I decided that I need to get involved and give back to Allina Health Hospice. So now it is my goal to help generate donations and help those that are in need just like my step mom was.

### What do you want others to know about Allina Health Hospice Foundation?

It is an amazing group of people that have dedicated their career and gifts of personal skills and time to end-of-life care. It is an honor to work with these amazing people for such an important cause.

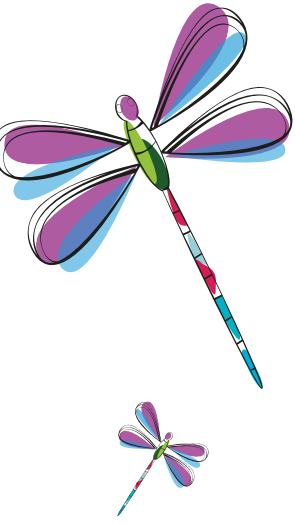
## A Better Way of Saying Goodbye

*Continued from page 1*

had written in her letter to Betty's team of caregivers in May. The care at Allina Health "enabled us to relax and [we knew] that hospice was there taking care of her and loving her as much as we did," Mary continued.

As Mary reflected on the initial hesitation regarding hospice care she also addressed the common misperceptions many still have regarding hospice care. "There is still the feeling that hospice is only for people who are dying and it is so much bigger than that. People shouldn't be afraid of [hospice care], the implications of it, or worry that it will be seen as giving up," Mary mentioned. "Hospice is as much [about] taking care of the family as it is [about] taking care of your loved one," Mary emphasized. And while the last days spent with a loved one are never easy, having others to rely on can make all the difference. As Mary noted, "[Hospice] opens the door to a better way of saying goodbye and that was so true for our family."

To support Allina Health Hospice so families like Mary's can experience the love, care and support hospice can provide, contact the Hospice Foundation at **612-775-2550** or online at [allinahealth.org/hospicefoundationgivenow](http://allinahealth.org/hospicefoundationgivenow).



## Recommended Reading:

- *Being Mortal* by Atul Gwande:  
A personal meditation on how we can live better age-related frailty, serious illness and approaching death
- *We Know How This Ends* by Cathy Wurzer:  
Surprising lessons in finding joy and personal growth in the last months of life
- *The Best Care Possible* by Ira Byock:  
Tackles the crisis that surrounds serious illness and dying in America and his quest to transform care through the end of life.

