Compassion when it’s needed most

Julia Orcutt, Tina Mohrland’s mother, seemed disoriented – not acting like herself – so Tina took her to the hospital thinking she may have suffered a minor stroke. Once there, the doctor expressed that it was more serious than anticipated, recommending hospice care.

“Her heart, lungs, liver, kidneys…everything, was shutting down. It all happened so fast,” said Tina.

Similar to many adults caring for elderly parents, Tina encountered a difficult situation – determining the best option for end-of-life care for her mother.

Tina and her family turned to Allina Health Hospice for guidance on what to do next. Tina’s sister knew of J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice, and agreed it would be a good fit for their mother but worried about the cost. “The hospice representative told us about the Wedum Compassion Fund that covers the cost of room and board at J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice for up to 20 days for those who qualify,” said Tina. Within 24 hours after applying, the Mohrlands were approved.

“When my sister and I walked in, there was such a sense of peace. It felt like home,” recalls Tina. “The dignity in which they handled my mother was amazing. She was nonresponsive at this point, but every person who came in my mother’s room introduced themselves and explained what they were doing. They would touch her forehead to let her know someone was there.”

Julia Orcutt passed away two days after arriving at J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice. Tina had been her mother’s caregiver since her father had passed away. “For the last two days, I was able to just be her daughter,” Tina shared. “To be with her around the clock in such a beautiful place and not have to provide care or worry – it was truly a gift.”

After their experience, Tina and her family wanted to give back. “I made sure memorials of my mother went to the Wedum Compassion Fund, so that other families could have that same gift.”

If you would like to make a gift to the Wedum Compassion Fund, please used the enclosed envelope or visit allinahealth.org/hospicefoundationgivenow.

Join us for the Dragonfly Gala!

The 13th Annual Allina Health Hospice Dragonfly Gala will be held on Friday, May 6, 2016, at Radisson Blu Mall of America. Event proceeds will benefit Allina Health Hospice including support to patients who cannot afford room and board at J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice. To learn more about this event or to register, visit allinahealth.org/hospicedragonflygala.
J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice: Nothing compares to home, but this comes close

A home-like setting - J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice was designed with the needs and wishes of hospice patients and their families in mind, providing the many comforts of home. Warm and inviting, J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice offers spacious family room areas, beautifully decorated patient rooms and serene outdoor space where families can be together 24/7.

Dragonfly ornament - When a hospice patient is actively dying, a staff member hangs a colorful, stained glass dragonfly ornament outside of the door to alert staff members, volunteers, family and friends that the patient is starting a new journey.

Customized nutrition plan - J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice offers customized nutrition plans for each patient. The cook, Michelle Davis, experienced nutrition and food service professional, meets with each patient and their family shortly after admittance and determines a patient's eating ability as well as preferences. The meals are served fresh to the patients when they are hungry, not at a scheduled meal time.

To learn more about J.A. Wedum Residential Hospice and the unique features designed for quality and compassionate care, call 651-635-9173 or visit allinahealth.org/wedum.

Caregiver’s guide through hospice

Being a caregiver for someone who is terminally ill can be stressful and exhausting, but there is help! During a recent podcast, Dr. Joseph Amberg, physician and medical director, Allina Health Hospice & Palliative Care, talks about hospice care and how to start the conversation with your loved one.

Podcast Host: People tend to get hospice and palliative care confused. What is the difference between the two?

Dr. Amberg: The important difference is that palliative care is the same kind of attention to comfort care, personal care and social needs but it can be provided for people who are not terminally ill. It can be provided for anyone with a chronic illness who needs extra attention to comfort. We like for people to get palliative care early in the course of any chronic illness. It gives them the power to direct their care according to what's important to them.

Host: What is your advice on starting a conversation with a loved one and getting them involved in hospice care?

Dr. Amberg: It's a very big decision. It's a tough time for people and family who are living with a terminal illness. Many people feel like choosing hospice is giving up because they will not be receiving any treatment to prolong their life. In fact, when people choose hospice care they will continue to live their life as they naturally would. They may even live longer and better than with usual care. It is very important that once you have made this difficult decision that everyone in the family supports you, too.

To listen to the full podcast Caregiver’s guide through hospice, visit allinahealth.org/wellcast.

Being Mortal

Written by: Angela Fahmy, Allina Health Hospice Foundation board chair

In his book Being Mortal, Atul Gawande, MD, uses his training as a physician and his experience as a son with aging parents to explore the way our culture looks at end of life. Our society has changed immeasurably over the past few decades, moving away from smaller communities where there was a common understanding of how older adults would be cared for to smaller families and an expectation that older adults make their own independent arrangements for their care as they age. Our medical culture focuses on treatment and cure, often to the exclusion of dialogue about quality of life and whether the patient wants – or will benefit from – further treatment. It's almost as if the experience of growing older has become a condition to overcome, a challenge to beat instead of a rich experience full of new opportunities for growth, wisdom and connectedness.

Dr. Gawande challenges us to rethink our understanding of what it means to grow old and approach the end of life. He leads us, as a community, to engage in conversation about what is meaningful for people as they face the end of their lives. How can we collectively care for the whole person that is actively approaching end of life, instead of merely treating individual diseases, conditions or symptoms? And how will we as a society transform the conversations individuals and families have about the importance of living life to the fullest, right until the very end? Dr. Gawande writes that, "Whatever the limits and travails we face, we want to retain the autonomy – the freedom – to be the authors of our lives – the battle of being mortal is the battle to maintain the integrity of one’s life – to avoid becoming so diminished or dissipated or subjugated that who you are becomes disconnected from who you were or who you want to be.” May we all have the courage and compassion to begin these vital conversations in our own communities.