

## Care at the End of Life

Martha got sick caring for her husband before she realized she needed it; Jacqueline didn't know it existed until three months after the long, devastating journey of caring for her father and Frank doesn't know what he would have done without it. The 'it' is hospice palliative care. Caring for a loved one at the end-of-life is one of the most difficult things a family has to face. It can also be one of the most rewarding especially with hospice palliative care.

Hospice care provides much needed relief for family caregivers, providing practical human comfort, emotional, psychological and spiritual support to patients and their loved ones – hospice integrates compassionate care in a variety of settings. It can also be made easier with proper Advance Care Planning, a process by which patients and their health care professional(s) discuss a patient's wishes about their health care choices at end of life. In January 2004 Human Resources Development Canada introduced the Compassionate Leave benefit which offers eight weeks leave (six paid) to eligible workers to care for gravely ill or dying parent, spouse or child.

The need for hospice volunteers continues to grow – currently more than 13,000 volunteers dedicate 630,000 hours of service each year in more than 450 communities throughout Ontario. In fact, hospice volunteers have become the largest direct service providers within Ontario's voluntary health care sector reflecting the growing need for compassionate support in the home.

As Ontario's population ages, the need for quality en-of-life care escalates. Statistics Canada estimates one out of every two Canadians of working age will be caring for a love done at home in the next generation. Each year more than 248,000 Canadians die with an estimated 160,000 needing hospice palliative care services. It is estimated that each death will immediately affect another five people.

Hospice Muskoka, Hospice Huntsville, Hospice West Parry Sound, Almaguin Palliative Care Team and Near North Palliative Care Network have been providing support to the residents of Muskoka and Parry Sound for many years. IN addition to the specially trained visiting volunteers, other services such as respite care and bereavement groups have been added to the roster of services. There are also friendly visiting programs in hospitals, retirement and long term care homes.

Hospice Palliative Care is the final and most precious gift that we can offer our loved ones. All Canadians have the right to die with dignity, free of pain, surrounded by their family in a setting of their choice. It is crucial that the Canadian health care system have the programs and services in place to provide quality end-of-life.

For more information contact Hospice Muskoka at 705-645-1687, Hospice Huntsville at 705-789-6878, Hospice West Parry Sound at 705-746-4540 ext. 1416, Almaguin Palliative Care Team at 705-636-5893 or the Near North Palliative Care Network at 1-800-287-9441.

Monthly support groups are held for family caregivers. All are welcome to attend these informal free sessions. Assistance may be available if you need respite or transportation to attend. For times and locations, contact 1-888-746-5102.

Presentations can be made to any size group on such topics as community resources, caregiving, hospice/palliative care, and prevention of abuse to older adults. Books and educational videos are also available from our lending library.