

COMMUNITY CHAMPIONS

HOSPICE CARE NETWORK

Every month, Newsday presents another Community Champions organization.

How To Reach Us:

Hospice Care Network
99 Sunnyside Boulevard
Woodbury, NY, 11797
516-832-7100
Admission and Referrals:
1-800-2-HOSPICE

Nominate a Community Champion on:

newsday.com

Call Joan Imhof at 631-843-2165

Newsday's Community Champions are selected by the following committee of distinguished

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Bringing Dignity to the End of a Life

Several years ago, Jean Barber of Long Beach and her daughters faced an event that no family wants to consider—the terminal illness and imminent death of her husband and their father.

Unable to find treatment, the family was in crisis mode. By the time they learned about Hospice Care Network (HCN), there was little time to make peace with the fact of Richard's impending death.

"We never had important discussions; we were just getting through it," Barber said.

It was only after Richard's death in 2005, while she was attending bereavement groups hosted by HCN, that Mrs. Barber learned what hospice care was really about.

Since 1998, Hospice Care Network has served more than 25,000 patients and is the second largest hospice care provider in the state. Its mission is to enable individuals to live with peace and dignity in a caring environment during the final stages of life. HCN offers care and comfort both to the patients and to those with whom they share their lives.

According to HCN President Maureen Hinkelman, the organization cares for 400 patients at any given time through a network of physicians, nurses, dietitians, social workers and spiritual counselors. It employs 222 full and 90 part-time staff and nearly 120 highly trained volunteers, who serve as companions or hairdressers to bolster a patient's self-esteem.

"Hospice is supportive care as opposed to aggressive treatment and is in a quiet, nurturing environment," Hinkelman said.

The majority of patients are cared for in-home, while others are in nursing homes or in HCN's inpatient hospice facilities—located in Melville and Valley Stream.

"We treat the whole family," Hinkelman said. "They wonder, 'Why is it happening to me?' Their faith may be affected by



RN's Asya Borthwick (center) and Suzanne Mulhern tend to Isabel Jimenez with respect.

what's happening; there are complex psycho-social issues associated with the impending loss."

Hinkelman says the agency's greatest challenge is the general lack of knowledge or understanding of hospice.

"Many people don't really know about hospice, or have the perception that the patient comes only in the last few days of life. When that happens, the family is already in crisis," she said. "The earlier they come, the more we can help prepare them. There is an opportunity to share among each other, to make the patient comfortable and to spend precious and meaningful time together."

With the tools she learned from HCN, Mrs. Barber was prepared when her cousin, Sandy Neeson of Kings Park, was diagnosed with cancer. HCN was brought in to provide pain management, nutritional and emotional support for Mrs. Neeson and counseling for her family.

"This family was able to travel this road

together. They took beautiful care of this woman and gave her permission to die," Barber said. "They came away hurting, but intact. When my husband died it was a struggle. If hospice is brought in earlier, and not just to administer pain medication but for social and emotional support, we will all be better for it."

HCN offers a host of services including group and individual bereavement counseling and special children's services. Pediatric hospice helps parents provide comfort and support to children with a terminal illness and helps families after a child's death. Its unique perinatal program supports parents expecting a baby not anticipated to survive. Since its inception three years ago, the organization has worked with 25 couples.

"We work with the family physician and staff," Hinkelman said. "For many of these families, they want to bring a child into the world and hold that child even if it is just for one or two hours."

—Karen Anderson Priokis