

Volunteers needed to share patients' final days

Training sessions for VON hospice program begin next Thursday

By GLEN POTOMA
Special to The Champion

The Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) hospice program's volunteers see death as a natural evolution

of life.

Hospice volunteers, who provide support to people with terminal illness and their families are in demand, according to north Halton

program coordinator Linda Shaver.

Volunteers find the experience rewarding, the coordinator said.

"You learn a lot about yourself and about the person you are helping," she explained.

Heather Lawton, a volunteer with the hospice program since 1990, agrees the volunteers get a lot out of the program. "If you have the time, it's somewhere you can be helpful," she said.

Working with health care team members and other agencies, volunteers are expected to provide support and comfort to clients and their families. The volunteers can take the patients out for coffee, to a park or to a library. Or if the patient isn't up to going out, the volunteer can go into the home and read stories, talk, play music, or anything to make the patient feel at ease.

The volunteers are closely screened, going through a number of interviews by the coordinators of the program. Applicants will not be recommended if they have suffered

bereavement within a year of applying. Ms Shaver said it's too difficult for volunteers to go into the program after losing someone close to them.

The program involves taking a training program one night a week for 10 weeks. Meetings include guest speakers who cover topics including funerals, wills and terminal illness. The role of the hospice volunteer is also a focus of the sessions.

After volunteers complete the training program, there are monthly support meetings designed to council the volunteers. According to Ms Lawton, it is human nature to become attached to patients. These support meetings allow volunteers to discuss what they are feeling in hopes of relieving some of the emotion in dealing with the death of a client. Co-ordinators encourage volunteers to call them anytime to discuss their feelings.

Speakers deal with issues of concern to the caregivers who in turn

are better equipped to deal with patients. Ms Lawton gave the example of a speaker who discussed prosthesis and make-up techniques used in funeral preparation. She pointed out this information can be extremely comforting to a chemotherapy patient who is worried about her looks.

Volunteers are expected to donate a minimum three hours a week, based on the condition of a patient. The hours, which are logged, can fluctuate from week to week. Ms Shaver noted that the patient sometimes prefers to stay in a hospital for a period of time. If the patient chooses that option, the caregiver will visit the patient often in the hospital, with volunteers sometimes even staying overnight.

A bereavement follow-up program for families offers support to allow them to carry on their lives as normally as possible. The volunteers help develop ways for the family to cope before and after the patient's death.

The hospice program relies on community support. Organizations such as the United Way help fund the project.

The next hospice volunteer training program begins Thursday, Apr. 15. If you wish to donate or volunteer, call 827-8800.

NOTICE

OAKVILLE-MILTON
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ANNUAL MEETING and DELEGATE ELECTIONS MEETING

MONDAY, APRIL 26, 1993

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 - 2) Constitution housekeeping amendments concerning the membership application form and business membership
 - 3) Address by Otto Jelinek
 - 4) Election of convention delegates



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