

Volunteer shortage

One-to-one care ideal for love-starved elderly

By SANDY HAZELL

An encouraging word, a spontaneous hug, a listening ear.

These are some of the ways caregivers express their special love for chronic care patients, encouraging their will to live.

Working as a team, nurses, aids, adjvents, activity, craft and life enrichment directors, all strive to help fragile seniors enjoy life despite their pain.

Besides meeting their basic human needs, caregivers keep the elderly physically active, socially involved, mentally stimulated and spiritually enriched.

"There's always more to be done than you have time for, but it's important to show tender loving care to patients, says Laura Wallace, part-time charge nurse at Bestview Health Care Centre.

While giving medication and treatment to the 50 residents, she "chats with them as much as I can", stopping along the hallway to give them "spontaneous hugs.

Deal with death

During her 19 years at Bestview, she has "learned to deal with death. It's emotionally difficult, but it's helpful knowing they have spiritual care with regular pastors.

She says most families are "very supportive, very loyal", visiting frequently.

"Shuffled from one doctor to another" over the years, 75-year-old Rena has yet to be accurately diagnosed for symptoms of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

Thomas Greenough, 79, spends each afternoon with his wife at Bestview. Although they cannot converse, "we know and understand each other... after 55 years, I'm richly blessed that I can see her every day."

"One of the things I value is

the heart quality of people who deal with the patients here," he says. "Nurses on duty have this feeling for older people which I like. Quite a few seem to love my wife. This is more important than anything."

While she is resting, he "gets a lot of satisfaction" from repairing wheelchairs to drawing cartoons for the residents on the bulletin board.

Eleven years ago, Eileen Bordash was invited to assist the seniors at Bestview for Christmas.

"I didn't cope very well," she admits candidly. "I had never seen that many sick, unhealthy seniors. But I also recognized I had to do something about it."

Felt inadequate

For four years, she did volunteer work at the home, taking residents bowling once a week.

"I still had those feelings of inadequacy. I was not able to talk about it. I was totally devastated. I stopped coming because I couldn't deal with it."

During her three month absence, one thing kept coming to her mind about the heavy care patients. "I had to overcome their physical condition and learn to cope with it. I knew they still needed love and respect."

After praying for direction, an opportunity arose for her to become activity director at Bestview.

"I feel you can't stop growing in this position to better the needs of the elderly," said Mrs. Bordash, now life enrichment director. She is personally responsible for the physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of the chronically ill elderly.

She also plans and implements activities and is responsible for recruiting and training volunteers. Bible class, crafts, bingo, sing alongs, bowling and

exercise are among the programs assisted by volunteers.

"Without volunteers, there wouldn't be ongoing programs," she said.

Norma Goldring, crafts director of Markhaven relies on 15 volunteers who "try and keep seniors occupied" at the inter-residential home.

Poor vision

As seniors are coming into the home at a later stage in life with arthritis, strokes, or poor vision, it is "hard to find jobs they're able to cope with, but we manage somehow..."

"Aging is hard to deal with. A person has to really like their job to work here," she said. "You prepare yourself the best you can for death. Anything you can do to give people a better life, you try to do it."

Gladys Rech, activity director at Markhaven said, "One of my favorite things is to keep seniors minds active with spelling bees, quizzes and 'Fun with Words'.

After working at the home for 17 years, she does "become attached" to some of the residents. "Sometimes it bothers me very much (when they die). I can empathize with them. They have given up everything. They feel lost, lonely and their independence is gone."

Adjvent Lynn Bartlett works with "special care groups" stimulating them physically and physiologically.

"I know they feel old and useless, but I try and look beyond that. I try to find the best things in them... to give them things they are physically able to do, to make them feel better about themselves."

A member of Markhaven's pastoral committee, Mrs. Bartlett realizes the importance of their spiritual needs, especially



Flora Sullivan, 88, receives a hug from Bestview Health Care Centre charge nurse Laura Wallace. At the local nursing home residents' emotional and spiritual well-being are as important as their physical condition. Employees wish they could spend more time on a one-to-one basis with each resident, but find it impossible without greater volunteer forces.

— Sandy Hazell

as they come to the end of their lives.

Build relationships

"You build relationships with them, they learn they can trust you. Even though the physical separation is hard, you know they're better off, especially if they have complete faith in Jesus Christ..."

Joanne Cleaver, full-time charge nurse at Bethany Lodge "doesn't find it difficult" when someone dies in the chronic care section of the home.

"I miss them. They are old and have lived a full life. I don't really grieve them. They are in a lot of pain. I don't want them to be in pain. It's easier for me to see them go, knowing they are in a better place after this."

People who have lived on their own all their lives and don't want to come to the home, find it "harder to adjust." Some are in such a confused mental state, "it's difficult for them to understand" when they move into the new surroundings.

"Most appreciate even just a word of encouragement. As well as cope with our tasks, we try and give tender loving care. It's difficult."

Caroline Wiseman, 26, thought it was "hard at first" to cope with death in the heavy care ward of Union Villa.

"Like grandparents"

Now, with seven years of experience as a nurse's aid, "You know what they've been through... you get used to it."

Darlene Brown, 23, who also started seven years ago as a nurse's aid, feels the residents "are like grandparents... People who don't have families depend on you more to talk to."

Residents often share hugs, kisses and occasionally give her chocolate bars. Working in teams of two, nurse's aids tend to the everyday needs of 15 residents.

Washing, dressing, bathing, all the patients; working together, they lift the fragile

seniors out of chairs, baths and beds.

"I feel like I'm always bothering them for something," said Ms. Brown who wheels them everywhere to meals, adjvent doctors, hairdressers — as part of their regimented schedule.

They are also responsible for a "wandering list", and noting changes in their eating habits, bowels, or refusing medication.

"I just love it," said Mary Smith, also a nurse's aid at Union Villa. "The residents constantly need tender loving care. So often you have to give them that extra hug. It's fun."

Referring fondly to them as "sweethearts", she feels the residents "could use students just to come in and talk. Sometimes we get so busy, we don't get a chance to talk."

This is Julie Tandy's second summer as a full-time training student.

Helping the adjvent exercising the residents, taking them for walks in the rose garden, and doing their nails are her favorite jobs.

Forgotten people

"I really love it. These people really need somebody. They're forgotten and need a friend," said the 18 year old. "You have to be a certain type of person who wants to do it (work with chronic care seniors.) It requires dedication, patience and understanding. You can't just jump into it."

A graduate of Markham District High School, Julie will be attending George Brown College this fall, and plans to work with seniors when she graduates.

To others contemplating working with seniors, she advises:

"If you're here just to do a job, don't do it. You have to be part of them. They like to be hugged, and shown that you care and understand. You have to have lots of patience, but most of all, you have to have heart."



Thomas Greenough, 79, serves a cup of hot chocolate to his wife Rena, 75, a resident of Bestview Health Care Centre. Mrs. Greenough shows symptoms of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, but has yet to be

properly diagnosed. Mr. Greenough says he values the compassion of the nursing staff.

— Sandy Hazell