

Stouffville

Close-Up

Hospice helped by Stouffville people

One of the most important advances in medical care in recent years has nothing to do with technology or amazing breakthroughs in genetics, yet its development will be crucial to many of us and our families.

It's called the hospice movement, and it provides caring emotional and physical support for the terminally ill and their relatives.

Hospices have been operating for many years in the United Kingdom, but are a recent phenomenon in Canada.

Traditionally set up as facilities where dying patients could go to spend their last weeks in a sympathetic environment under the care of specially trained staff, the term also covers the provision of a similar care program in the patient's own home.

Carol Perley is a registered nurse who has worked with Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) in Metro, and currently works part time at Scarborough Centenary Hospital.

It was she who spearheaded the Markham-Stouffville Hospice movement.

"When I was with VON I worked in the home care program and after I left, I found I missed being at the bedside, so I decided to volunteer in the hospice movement," she recalls.

Two years ago, she visited Hospice King, and was referred to Hospice Thornhill, which suggested she should start a movement in the Markham-Stouffville area.

"I called some phone numbers they gave me and a few days later, 10 of us met around my fireplace and brainstormed for about three hours," recalls Carol.

That led to public meetings at Unionville and Markham libraries and the response was incredible.

It was decided that an education program should be set up and she was overwhelmed at the number of dedicated volunteers who came forward.

"We started our first training

program a year ago last September," she says.

A number of factors were stressed, including creative listening skills and pastoral care, as well as the importance of just being there as a friend.

"The idea is to be supportive without being intrusive," explains Carol. "We also discussed humor in palliative care, as well as for the care-giver in the family and for the volunteer."

The volunteers now have meetings on the fourth Wednesday of every month at Locust Hill United Church, and host a pot luck supper every three or four months.

"We get together for fellowship and education sessions," notes Carol. "It's a sharing time for us."

Markham-Stouffville Hospice is run by a board of directors, which includes dentist Dr. Bill Murphy and Chief of Family Practice at the new Markham-Stouffville Hospital, Dr. Andrew Patterson.

When a person is terminally ill, says Carol, "so often the neighbors, the church family and other community groups want to help, but they don't know what to say or do."

The hospice group pools its resources and builds a team, organizes a schedule of care which

suits the patient and the family.

Since many of the volunteers have been through similar experiences with their own families, "they know how to intervene at just the right time."

The attitude of local volunteers has been exceptional, she stresses. "Stouffville is a unique and wonderful place. This community has really rallied around the hospice."

And because support encompasses the entire family, it doesn't end when the patient dies.

"The care continues and we'll make regular visits if the family wants us to," says Carol.

This approach also helps the volunteers, who become close to the family during the care-giving process.

Markham-Stouffville Hospice currently has 73 volunteers including the 15 people who make up the board of directors, and welcome interested newcomers.

All it takes, says Carol, is an interest in palliative care and love for other human beings.

The time commitment is up to the individual. "It's usually about two hours a week, but some people have heavy schedules and only give a couple of hours a month," says Carol. "They do whatever they can manage."

Markham-Stouffville Hospice has an office at the Markham Neighborhood Support Centre, which is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings.

"My vision is that we'll eventually get our own building with an out-patient clinic area for patients to come through the day to give respite to the families," she says. "I'd love to have a lovely old home, where families could stay as well."

In the meantime, the organization badly needs financial help.

"We put memorial cards in the funeral homes and Sorority adopted us last year. We also go an initial grant from the Town of Markham and a gift from the Latcham Foundation, but we're still desperate for funds," she explains.

"At the moment we're all volunteers. I gave up a full time job at Centenary to try and manage this; I never believed it would take off the way it has," Carole notes.

She and fellow volunteers strongly believe that everyone has the right to die in the place of their choice, surrounded by loving, comforting friends and family.

"As far as we're concerned, we're not caring for the dying, we're caring for the living," she concludes.



Members of Markham-Stouffville Hospice gathered for their regular pot luck dinner at Locust Hill United Church last week to share time with one another. Hospice member Carol Perley spearheaded the local organization, and says Stouffville has "really rallied around the hospice." Terminally ill patients benefit from compassionate hospice care.

Stouffville doctor busy at new hospital

Although Stouffville is sometimes eclipsed by its larger neighbor to the south, Markham-Stouffville Hospital is one major undertaking which genuinely involves both communities.

Local physician Dr. Andrew Patterson, of the Stouffville Medical Centre, has been named Chief of Family Practice at the new facility, a position for which he is well qualified.

"I've been in family practice since graduating from McGill," he notes.

"I worked for a time in Montreal, and spent three years in rural Nova Scotia as a family practitioner in a 13-bed hospital."

For the next four years he worked as a civilian general practitioner with the Canadian Armed Forces in Germany. While he was there, one of his major roles was that of obstetrician, delivering babies for the wives of servicemen stationed there.

In 1984, he and his family moved to Stouffville.

"I had visited here in 1975, and I thought at the time what a charming small rural community it was. I was somewhat surprised when I arrived in 1984 and found it had grown up quite a bit," he says.

Happily, however, it still retained the atmosphere which had attracted him initially.

"I knew what type of practice I was coming to, and that was what I wanted," he recalls. "I've never regretted coming to Stouffville; I find the people are very pleasant to deal with as patients."

His involvement with the hospital goes back to 1984

when he began attending monthly meetings of the Markham-Stouffville Medical Society, formed by area doctors in 1982 when approval for the hospital was granted.

The function of the organization was to keep local physicians aware of the latest developments regarding the hospital, and to serve as a forum to advise the board of directors in their planning for the new facility.

"Since I arrived, I've been attending those meetings," explains Dr. Patterson. "At the point where they were starting to fill positions within the hospital, the chief of staff was a family practitioner from Markham, and I applied to be chief of family practice as a Stouffville practitioner."

His new duties will not affect his local practice, he stresses.

"The only way this changes things is that it makes me more efficient, because my patients, instead of being a half-hour away when they're in hospital, will be 10 minutes away. I'll be able to visit them more easily," he states.

Doctors at the Medical Centre will continue to provide emergency coverage for their patients, he adds.

"One of the main advantages that this hospital gives us is that we will have consultant staff and sophisticated lab and x-ray facilities much closer by than previously."

His position at the hospital is largely an administrative one, he says.

"It just means that I attend meetings. I and other doctors in our practice will still be working the same number of hours here."

He will be particularly involved in the Birth Place, the unit of the obstetrical department where new mothers will labor, give birth and rest until their transfer to the mother-baby unit.

One of my other main areas of involvement at present is in the planning of the continuing care ward," he says.

Dr. Gwen Sampson, who is also on staff at the Stouffville Medical Centre, will oversee the ward on a regular basis.

Of the hospital's overall mission, Dr. Patterson observes, "I think it's going to be a real credit to our hospital that there's such a patient-centred philosophy, and the credit for that goes to the board of directors and to the administrative staff, from the president of the hospital on down."

Although we have a modern facility, with state of the art equipment, the attention will be very personal," he concludes.

"We have the equipment when it's required, but we won't have situations where people are attached to a machine and don't see a nurse all day long. Patients can expect really personal care from the medical and nursing staff."



Dr. Patterson Local presence