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Hospice provider marks 20th anniversary

Posted by: Patrick Gallagher | Posted date: September 12, 2012 | In: Health Care, Westchester | comment : 0

When Hospice & Palliative Care of Westchester (HPCW) was founded in 1992, the organization served roughly 20 patients, all of whom were suffering from cancer.

As it marks its 20th anniversary, the White Plains nonprofit, initially a collaboration of Visiting Nurse Services in Westchester Inc. and White Plains Hospital, serves more than 120 patients daily, and has grown from a staff of 20 to a team of 65 employees and more than 50 specially trained volunteers.

While cancer patients are still a focal point of the organization, HPCW has significantly expanded the scope of its work over the past several years due to regulatory changes on the state and federal levels, said Executive Director Mary K. Spengler.

"Now, only about 30 percent of our patients have a cancer diagnosis," Spengler said, adding that HPCW also treats people suffering from heart and kidney disease, neurological diseases such as ALS, Alzheimer's and dementia, and even children suffering from pediatric diseases.

Whereas HPCW initially worked exclusively in people's homes, it now serves patients in nursing homes or independent or assisted living homes as well.

Spengler said the types of services available have also expanded drastically.

"In the initial stages it was heavily nursing-dominated," she said. Today, she said, HPCW employs a medical director, registered nurses, licensed social workers, spiritual counselors, bereavement counselors and certified home health aides, in addition to its administrative staff.

Under its Complementary Care Program, HPCW offers therapies at no cost to patients, including massage, music and art therapies, acupuncture, reflexology and reiki, a practice that uses a technique known as "palm healing" or "hands-on healing."

Spengler said recent legislation has expanded the services for which hospice and palliative care providers are eligible to be reimbursed, but added the public is largely unaware of the increased availability of end-of-life care options.

She cited a study by the Hospice and Palliative Care Association of New York State, which showed only about 40 percent of Medicare recipients who would be eligible for hospice services are receiving them.

"That's probably better than it was 10 years ago but not yet where it needs to be," Spengler said.

About 90 percent of HPCW patients are on Medicare, Spengler said.

There is currently no reimbursement for the expressive therapies and bereavement services provided by HPCW, Spengler said, meaning the organization is dependent on donations and fundraising.

HPCW exclusively serves Westchester residents.

As part of its 20th anniversary, HPCW will hold an "In Celebration" gala Sept. 27 at the Westchester Country Club in Rye.

Those seeking more information on the gala are asked to contact Holly Benedict at (914) 682-1484, extension 122.

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Written by: [Patrick Gallagher](#) on September 12, 2012.

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