

Fergus branch:

Providing end-of-life care with skill and compassion



Since opening in October 2004, Bayshore Home Health's Fergus branch has served Ontario's Wellington and Dufferin counties.

The branch's 30 nurses offer mainly palliative care, through contracts with two Community Care Access Centres (Waterloo Wellington and Central West) and to clients referred by Veterans Affairs Canada. The branch also has a small number of personal support workers.

"To provide palliative care, I think a nurse needs to have excellent listening and communication skills, assessment skills, compassion and professionalism," says Cheryl Chambers, Area Director, who has been at the branch for two years. "We have a highly skilled, focused group of nurses and PSWs who are very invested in their clients' care and enjoy their work."

About half of the nurses have completed Comprehensive Advanced Hospice Palliative Care Education (CAPCE), an extensive course provided by the Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultation Program in Southwestern Ontario. Nurses who take part in the program learn to identify issues that affect patients with progressive, life-threatening illnesses, as well as strategies that can help them and their families. Nurses attend classes and apply skills such as assessment, information sharing, care planning and decision making to enhance their expertise in building therapeutic relationships.

In addition to CAPCE training, many nurses at the branch have taken a chemotherapy administration course through the de Souza Institute, which was established in 2008 by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The Toronto-based institute offers a standardized program in chemotherapy and biotherapy administration for nurses, developed in consultation with oncology nursing experts. The program meets Cancer Care Ontario standards for chemotherapy delivery. "Chemotherapy administration hasn't been done in the community until recently, so it's an exciting thing. In this area, it's unique to Bayshore," says Chambers.

The branch also provides ongoing training and in-service sessions to ensure that its nurses have the latest and best information. Carol Kopp, Director of Clinical Management, organizes sessions on different types of illnesses and topics such as the

fundamentals of palliative care, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and therapeutic boundaries. "Carol does a terrific job of getting education on anything new. She just recently partnered with the de Souza Institute and a number of community partners, including nursing homes and two local hospitals, to organize education sessions on pain management. A speaker came from the de Souza Institute, and we held one-day sessions in April and June, to try to reach more people," says Chambers.

Patients and their families frequently express their gratitude to the branch's staff for their excellent care and thoughtfulness. To give but one example, a client said that the nurses' expert care, compassion and understanding were a great help to the family as they adjusted to the twists and turns along the journey of dealing with cancer. "The positive feedback goes on and on for the job our nurses do," says Chambers.

The branch has a staff advisory council, which reviews any issues brought forward by employees and works toward solutions. It also holds monthly staff meetings to discuss topics such as health and safety, recruitment, in-service training and upcoming events.

The employees are a close-knit group who help each other handle the challenges of each busy workday. "The staff care about each other," says Chambers. "My favourite thing about working at the branch is the great people. I'm so lucky that I have such a dedicated, happy staff – they love to come to work every day. And that's wonderful, to be around people who are so positive and motivated."

Just for fun, staff members get together, families in tow, for a Christmas party and summer barbecues. Branch staff also participate in the annual national Hike for Hospice, and the money raised is donated to Hospice Wellington and Hospice Dufferin. In August, staff are also planning to take part in a golf tournament in support of Hospice Dufferin.

These charitable activities are a natural extension of employees' caring attitude. "Our staff are totally dedicated to their patients," says Chambers. "They're very committed."

For more information, please contact cchambers@bayshore.ca

From left to right: Lisa Walker, Cheryl Chambers, Carol Kopp, Avril Hurst and Lesley Dagenais



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