



Giving Back Through Hospice

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By NANCY K. CREVIER

This is the firsts in a series of brief profiles of local individuals who volunteer with Regional Hospice of Western Connecticut.

Annette Vickery of Newtown has been a volunteer with Regional Hospice of Western Connecticut for two years, ever since the registered nurse retired from the Danbury Hospital Emergency Department.

"After I left the hospital, I had to do something. I loved my job, and I love helping people," said Ms Vickery.

While her position as a hospice volunteer does not allow her to act as a nurse, her medical training does have its benefits, she said. "There are three full days of training to become a hospice volunteer. I think that being a nurse, I was familiar with a lot of it. There was a great deal for emphasis on privacy, and on keeping the visits low key," she said. Having been around very sick and dying patients her whole career, she feels that she is better prepared than some lay people to deal with the hospice situations, in which patients are all terminal.

"Not everybody who goes through hospice training decides to become a volunteer," pointed out Ms Vickery. "Some people find that it is just not right for them," she said.

Founded in 1983, Regional Hospice of Western Connecticut provides compassionate in-home care to families of patients with advanced illnesses, through patient-focused care, education, resources, and advocacy, according to the website, regionalhospicect.org. Regional Hospice of Western Connecticut serviced more than 500 people in the region last year, including residents of Newtown and Sandy Hook.

There is a peaceful aspect to being with the hospice patients, Ms Vickery said, but her greatest contribution is the support she gives to the caregivers.

"I stay with the patient for two or three hours, to give the caregiver a break. When families see a hospice volunteer there, they feel so confident and comfortable leaving the patient in our care, knowing we are well trained and caring," Ms Vickery said. Just that brief break during the day is greatly appreciated by the caregivers. "You see that it makes a big difference," she said.

More than the immediate physical care she was used to providing as an emergency department nurse, Ms Vickery said that hospice care is a much more emotional sort of contact.

"You do get attached to the patients. But you know that death is a part of life. My hospice motto is that you get back more than you give. It makes you feel good to be doing something useful," she said.

Ms Vickery volunteers once or twice a week, with each visit scheduled for a two-hour span.

"I walk out feeling good, though," she said. "If you can touch somebody a little bit, that's what it's all about."

To find out about becoming a hospice volunteer, visit regionalhospicect.org, or contact Carolyn Wolfe, volunteer director, at 203-702-7415 or e-mail CWolfe@RegionalHospiceCT.org.



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Retired RN Annette Vickery says she finds great fulfillment through her service as a volunteer for Regional Hospice of Western Connecticut. —Bee Photo, Crevier

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