

Hospital volunteer program provides service, kindness

By Gary Henley
Of the Emerald

Sacred Heart General Hospital, the largest medical facility between Portland and San Francisco, has a staff of 400 physicians and 2,000 employees and offers many specialized services usually found only in large metropolitan areas.

But vital contributions to the hospital's function also come from volunteers.

Whether it be the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, who established the hospital in the early 1930s, the Red Cross Gray Ladies, who started a volunteer program after World War II, or high school and college students, volunteers at Sacred Heart provide necessary kindness, service and support, said Ferne Hoffman, director of the hospital's volunteer-services program.

Volunteer positions requiring minimal training include dietary assistants, dismissal hostesses and receptionists, Hoffman said. Volunteers also work in the hospital's emergency department, hospice, library, pharmacy, gift shop and on nursing floors delivering supplies and equipment, she said.

Volunteers also play an important role in comforting and caring for patients, Hoffman said. Pediatric-recreation volunteers entertain and read to children at their bedside or in a children's playroom, and pastoral-care volunteers make first contact with newly admitted patients and refer any further needs to hospital chaplains, she said.

Volunteers also direct families and friends to a patient's location after surgery and explain to the patient or patient's family how units of blood may be replaced.

In the short-stay unit, volunteers assist with non-nursing duties, helping patients into bed, assisting families who wait, serving snacks, replenishing supplies and dismissing patients.

About one-fourth of Sacred Heart's 400 active volunteers are students, Hoffman said.

"The college students are usually the pre-med, pre-health or health education majors here for basic training and knowledge," she

said. "We do have high school students working here, usually during the summer, as nursing unit volunteers whose job it is to move patients in and out."

Cindy Graham of South Eugene High School is spending her summer as a volunteer. Graham, who also volunteers during the school year, works in pediatrics at the hospital, taking care of patients of all ages.

"It's rewarding — I've been called an angel," Graham said. "I was with Medical Explorers and I wanted to get more involved, and through that I did. My job here is basically looking after patients and being there when they need something."

Any kind of volunteer work is rewarding, said longtime volunteer Dorothy Miller, who has been at Sacred Heart for 20 years. "I've always wanted to help, and you always receive more than you give as a volunteer," she said.

Nancy Humphrey, a former University student, pointed out other reasons that explain why volunteers donate time.

"I like the feeling that I'm immediately helping someone," she said. "I get to meet a lot of people, and I always get good feedback from them, so I like to contribute as much as I can."

People interested in becoming a nursing-unit volunteer must be at least age 15 and must complete an instructional course that is taught at local high schools by school nurses, and at Sacred Heart by a registered nurse. The course teaches basic nursing principles and patient care. Trained nursing-unit volunteers work under the supervision of nursing personnel.

A volunteer guide handbook distributed by the hospital lists desired "volunteer qualities" that include emotional stability, physical ability to do assigned work, possessing an understanding of the pressures and tensions under which the staff works, and a preparedness for moments of crisis and emergency.

Volunteers also must follow a set of ethics and must adhere to certain procedures while on the job.

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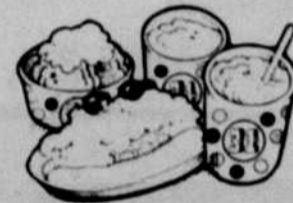
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