Respect at the end of the journey

November is National Hospice and Palliative Care Month

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

Contributed photo

The hospice staff at Blue Mountain Home Health and Hospice.

November may be a time of gratitude for many, but the month also recognizes the vital effort to provide comfort by hospice and palliative care workers.

Erin Gosnell, the hospice case manager at Blue Mountain Home Health and Hospice in John Day, said hospice is focused on end of life care for people who have a terminal diagnosis. Hospice also provides physical, emotional and spiritual support to the patient and family.

Palliative care provides comfort while a patient continues to seek treatment for a terminal diagnosis.

"The family and the primary caregivers are all supported by our hospice team for the full course of a patient's hospice time," Gosnell said. "That support isn't just the patient receiving care, but it also continues past that to help the caregiver and family cope with the next chapter of life and go through the grief process."

The family also has access to grief and bereavement support for up to a year after the patient passes away.

Gosnell said it's common for patients to receive hospice care when they're in a medical crisis very close to the end of their life. Hospice is not always understood or utilized because the patient is in crisis mode, Gosnell said.

She said it is important for patients with a terminal diagnosis to request information on hospice early so wishes can be known and the process can start before a crisis.

"You can be prepared, but you really can't be prepared enough to face the end of life and that grief," Gosnell said. "It's better to have all the support and education and resources available early on instead of the end."

The decision to go into hospice carries a substantial weight. A patient chooses comfort over a curative route of care, Gosnell said.

She said the decision should be reviewed with a physician, but many times families will say they wish they started the process sooner.

As the hospice case manager, Gosnell provides education and consultations on hospice, and pre-screens patients to see if they meet the insurance admissions criteria.

"Even if patients have a diagnosis but aren't quite ready for hospice and just want some information, it's so important to look at the resources and information so you're fully informed and able to make a better decision when the time comes," Gosnell said.

There are multiple disciplines involved in the hospice team that deal with various key parts of hospice care.

The nursing staff handles the bulk of the physical care of the patients.

A social worker provides bereavement and grief support. Guidance is also provided for a patient and their family to handle end-of-life issues such as ensuring financial affairs are in order and looking into placement at other facilities for additional care.

A chaplain focuses on the spiritual health and well-being of a patient and their family. Gosnell said the chaplain and social worker continue working after a patient's death as they provide families with bereavement care.

Certified nursing assistants provide personal care for a hospice patient from bathing and dressing to light housekeeping, which can lighten the load for caregivers.

Dr. Zac Bailey is the hospice medical director and plays a role in managing hospice care and overseeing the program for Blue Mountain Hospital District.

Gosnell said each discipline plays an important part in hospice care because they all work toward providing the physical, emotional and spiritual support a patient and family needs.

Gosnell shared her favorite quote on hospice: "Hospice matters. The end of life deserves as much beauty, care and respect as the beginning."

"I think so many times death is not talked about, and it's a scary thing to talk about, but it is a part of life just like birth is," Gosnell said. "I think so many times we don't talk about it, and it gets overlooked, but I think it deserves as much attention, beauty and respect as the beginning."

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> —**Erin Gosnell**, Blue Mountain Home Health and Hospice case manager

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Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Julie Ellison

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Downtown John Day

Parade Theme
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HAPPY THANKSGIVING DAY

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