

Vigil Volunteers: The Power of Presence at Bedside

DYING IS A SACRED TIME IN LIFE, filled with meaning and emotion. Historically, death was held in high regard with family and friends gathering around the dying person. Today, in our country, it is common to see hospice patients with few to no family members nearby or overwhelmed family caregivers forgoing sleep to ensure their loved one is not alone.

As a nonprofit hospice, we simply could not deliver our mission of providing compassionate care to those facing end of life without the support of our volunteers. They provide companionship, caregiver respite, and make comforting handknit items such as lap blankets. There is a special group of volunteers that we call upon when a patient transitions to their final days of life: vigil volunteers.

Vigil volunteers receive specialized training on the medical, emotional, and spiritual trajectories of end of life. This type of volunteer

service requires both compassion for others and self-awareness for self-care. Some choose to become a vigil volunteer because of personal experience and recognize the enormous value of their presence during this vulnerable time. Vigil volunteers work in two-hour shifts, often throughout the night.

The hospice care team strives to get to know the needs and wishes of patients and their families. It is ideal for patients to share their vision for their own vigil, however communication during the final days is often minimal. Each death, like each person, is different. The vigil volunteer tailors their approach to fit each individual family's unique wants and needs which may include showing compassion, listening, lighting candles, playing specific music or inviting the Threshold Choir. At minimum, volunteers are a calm presence at bedside to make sure the person dying is fully supported and cared for.

"I feel honored and humbled to sit with someone in quiet sacred companionship as they do the work of crossing over, moment by moment."

—VOLUNTEER, KRISTI MCMORRAN

We know that these final hours of support make a positive impact, not just on the dying person, but on the family. Knowing their loved one is being watched over may lessen the effects of complicated grief and feelings of guilt for distant family members or friends. Vigil volunteers reinforce the patient's dignity and worth of companionship in this most vulnerable time. Being fully present with the dying and experiencing the wonder and mystery of death has an impact on helping us live life to the fullest.

To learn more about other services offered at Lumina and ways to support us, visit luminahospice.org 



I cannot know what is going on in the mind of the dying once they stop communicating, but I can be there to assure them that they are not alone, to provide respite for their family, and to tend to the needs of their body in its last hours."

—VOLUNTEER, GIANA BERNARDINI



Self-Care vs. Self-Soothing

Caring for a family member or friend can be a rewarding and challenging experience. It can also be overwhelming and isolating. The health effects of stress on caregivers are real. If ignored, stress can lead to anger, depression, emotional disorders, physical illness, and loss of intimacy. Additionally, stress can contribute to many health problems, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

Practicing self-care to combat stress is important but is often confused with self-soothing. The two terms have become interchangeable. Self-care is not eating a pint of ice cream while binge-watching your favorite reality television show—this is self-soothing, a reaction to stress. We participate in self-soothing activities when we have reached a breaking point and need to feel better in the moment. **Self-care is being mindful of your needs and taking long-term steps to fulfill them.** Examples of



self-care include scheduling medical appointments, drinking enough water, getting enough sleep, and eating well.

Not to worry; practicing both is important to our health. Self-soothing is a component of self-care. The trick is to stay mindful of our responses and keep everything in moderation. ✨

Elizabeth Wessinger Award

Each year the Oregon Hospice & Palliative Care Association (OHPCA) chooses an individual who makes a difference for end-of-life care in our state or across the nation. **The Elizabeth Wessinger Award celebrates the individual whose spirit and actions contribute to the improvement and advancement of hospice and palliative care beyond their own community.** Beth Wessinger, and her husband, Fred, believed wholeheartedly in OHPCA's mission to ensure all Oregonians have access to high quality end-of-life care. They have supported the agency in many ways, including establishing a trust for OHPCA through the Oregon Community Foundation.

We are pleased to announce that Lumina nurse, **Tracy Calhoun**, is the recipient of the **2023 Elizabeth Wessinger Award!** With 35 years of nursing experience, Tracy contributes an immense amount of expertise to Lumina's team as well as nursing students completing their practicum and nurses new to the hospice and palliative care field. Tracy is also passionate about pet therapy. With her own dogs, JJ who died in 2017, and Ember (pictured here), Tracy has spent over 20 years working and volunteering with pet therapy teams. Join us in congratulating Tracy on this prestigious award! ✨



Tracy contributes an immense amount of expertise to Lumina's team as well as nursing students ... and nurses new to the hospice and palliative care field.



Above: Mo Weinman (Director of Nursing), Amy Baird (Executive Director), and Tracy Calhoun.

Right: Ember, Tracy's current therapy dog



THE FACE OF LUMINA

BY AMY BAIRD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



From my first day as a Medical Social Worker in September of 2019, I have always been proud to work for Lumina. Now, I am privileged to lead this incredible organization as Executive Director.

I am inspired daily by our staff and the amazing work they do for people in our community who are facing terminal illnesses and end of life.

The face of Lumina is not just one. Each of our employees are the face of Lumina and I know they represent our organization well. So, it is no surprise to me when our staff are recognized by the larger community for the amazing work they do. Four of our nurses have been nominated for the Corvallis Gazette Time's 2023 Outstanding Nurses feature. Chelsea, Jody, Susie and Teresa provide compassionate care to our patients and their families. I am honored to see their dedication and passion recognized by our local community.

I am also proud to announce that Tracy Calhoun has been awarded the 2023 Elizabeth Wessinger Award of Excellence in Hospice and Palliative Care. This is a prestigious, state-wide award given to individuals whose spirit and actions add to the advancement of hospice and palliative care inside and outside of their own communities. Tracy has always been a champion of hospice care throughout her career and has been a backbone of our nursing staff here at Lumina. Some of her notable accomplishments include providing support to the Pile of Puppies program, which provides opportunities for terminally ill children to interact with puppies, and presenting "Barke Diem: Healing Hearts Through the Power of Pet Therapy" at the 2022 Oregon State University Gerontology Conference.

Please join me in recognizing all of our staff, the faces of Lumina, for the amazing work they do in our community and beyond! ✨

Heartfelt Thanks

Lumina would like to thank all of the community members that think of us throughout the year.

This holiday season we were able to bring joy to our patients with candy cane wreaths made by the 4-H youth of OSU Extension Services and tabletop Christmas trees decorated by the St. Mary's Flowers Girls' Club.

The Flowers Girls' Club also provided flower bouquets and cards for Valentine's Day.



We would also like to thank Girl Scout Cadette Troop 21232 from Benton Service Unit 29 for making feelie hearts for our patients who are grieving. ✨

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

As a community-based non-profit, Lumina is committed to providing support, at no cost, to caregivers and those facing end of life in our community. This support is only possible thanks to the generosity of our community donors.

To learn how you can support Lumina, go to luminahospice.org/donate



OPEN HEART COMMUNITY MEMORIAL



We invite you to join us at Starker Arts Park on Saturday, May 20th anytime between 10am and 1pm to remember and honor those who have died by writing their names onto ribbons and tying them to a large heart sculpture.

For more information, go to luminahospice.org/openheart



Lumina
Hospice & Palliative Care

Founded as **Benton Hospice Service** in 1980

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