

Guiding people from one stage to the next

Hospice nurse Bette Wood provides support, care and comfort to patients and their families

When Bette Wood was in nursing school in Nebraska, she was taught that you learn from your patients.

That lesson stayed with her.

She continues to listen to her patients and learn from them at Volunteer Hospice of Clallam County.

While working with terminal patients and their families could seem like a weighty role, speaking with Bette turns it into one full of healing and learning.

To describe the role of a hospice nurse, Wood tells a story about a patient she worked with early in her hospice career.

That patient saw the role of a hospice nurse as a sherpa, and Wood finds it to be a fitting comparison.

“My job is to guide them from camp to camp and make sure they have all that they need when they get to the next stage,” she says. “It’s very special.”

After graduating in 1973, the now “seasoned nurse” — as she describes herself — worked in critical care and coronary care before transitioning to home health and eventually hospice.

“Hospice is my passion,” says Wood, who can easily talk about the many reasons she enjoys being a hospice nurse.

Even though a patient may be terminal, there is still an emotional, spiritual or other type of personal healing taking place.

“It’s the most holistic type of nursing you can go into,” she explains. “Even when we’re at the end of our life, it’s all about healing.”



PHOTO BY TRISHA MCMAHON

Bette Wood sits in the nurses' office of Volunteer Hospice of Clallam County in Port Angeles.

Since she became a hospice nurse in 1994, she has seen many kinds of healing happen with patients and families.

Volunteer Hospice of Clallam County provides care, support and services to terminally ill patients and their families, without charge to them.

“We’re very fortunate in this community to have this organization,” Wood says of Volunteer Hospice, where she has worked since 2004.

She particularly likes how they have the freedom to work with a palliative care philosophy.

Visiting patients and families helps her get to know them and understand what they need and want.

Hospice is there not only for the patient, but also for the family.

“We help them know they’re not alone,” she says, often acting as a counselor between the patient and

family members.

“They have someone they can call and we help them learn strategies for coping,” she says.

Even after someone passes away, Volunteer Hospice continues to provide support opportunities.

The importance of supporting the family is particularly personal for Wood, who received another lesson in care when she cared for her terminally ill mother.

“Being a caregiver for my mother really opened my eyes,” she says, as she learned a difficult lesson in what family members needed.

Wood’s care is something Helen Mills notes in her letter nominating Wood for *Celebrating Nurses*.

“She is so caring and knowledgeable and made me and the rest of our family feel safe during a really intense experience,” writes Mills, whose mother Wood had cared for.

“I don’t think we could have gone through the process without her,” Mills adds. “I am aware that over the years Bette has helped hundreds of families like ours provide their loved one the opportunity to die at home.”

While death can be an uncomfortable topic for many to discuss, Wood finds it an opportunity to learn.

“I have learned more about living by working with people who are dying,” she says.

“We take living for granted,” she says.

— TRISHA MCMAHON