

‘There’s no roadmap to life,’ but hospice care helps point the way: family members

When Gordon Barnes asked The Auroran to visit him at Newmarket's Margaret Bahen Hospice last month, one of his objectives was to highlight the value of hospice care for patients and their families alike at end-of-life.

These sentiments were highlighted by Jane, who asked that her real name not be used, whose father was receiving care just across the hall.

‘There’s no roadmap to life and you don’t know what you’re going to need when you get to this stage with a loved one,’ she said. ‘Margaret Bahen had already thought out all the things you need with support for every stage involved and then there’s the most special kind of care they provide. Every kind of comfort is afforded for. They have thought ahead about what keeps people physically comfortable, mentally comfortable, the types of food you would find comforting; the way you can sit with company in quiet rooms or a garden they just know these things that will help make you and your loved one, who is the patient, more comfortable, for sure.’

Her father, she said, wanted to stay at home until the very last day of his life, but there came a point where that was impossible. It was not possible for him, nor was it possible for his wife, who served as a primary caregiver.

The family laid out all the options for him, including residential hospice care.

There might have been some initial questions, but, says his daughter, ‘you don’t really know until you get here.’

‘It’s hard to make that kind of warm environment where everyone is working so hard, everyone is pulled in a million directions post’ COVID,’ she says of hospitals, punctuating her sentence with air quotes. ‘Here, it feels like a combination of home and the care of the hospital, which we tell my father, every day, is the most incredible combination you can have. It’s not just because we tell him that, it’s now because he feels that, and if he can’t be at home wow, this is an amazing second choice and it certainly doesn’t feel like a second choice. It feels like it would be anyone’s first choice because you’re not going to get this care at home that’s plain and simple.’

‘We’re lucky to be here and for this to exist. I didn’t even know this existed and it is very special.’

Margaret Bahen Hospice, a 10-bedroom facility located adjacent to Southlake Regional Health Centre, was opened in November of 2017 and now has over 150 volunteers in its roster to provide what they describe as ‘loving support.’

‘The Hospice philosophy of care is very resident- and family-centred; making sure that pain and symptoms are managed and that not only the physical being is cared for but also that emotional and spiritual needs are met,’ says the Hospice. ‘Hospice care can begin very early in a person’s diagnosis with a life-limiting illness. Working with Doane House Hospice, a community hospice specializing in grief and bereavement for over 30 years, we also offer care for the caregiver services. By working together, we ensure a seamless continuum of palliative care options to meet the needs of individuals and their loved ones.’

‘‘End of Life’ and palliative care options are a very personal choice and each individual has a very different set of priorities, beliefs and care needs that all factor into these decisions. One thing that all residential hospices have in common is they simply could not survive without the support of their volunteers and donors. We will be looking to recruit new volunteers from Newmarket and the surrounding community for a number of important roles, from visiting with residents to assisting in the kitchen to provide administrative support.’

While Jane lives in Toronto, the value of having a facility close to her parents’ is clear and when the final chapter of her father’s life was complete, she said she would roll up her sleeves for local organizations providing similar services.

?When friends who are local here say they had heard of this place, seeing it first-hand they had no idea of the comforts at every turn ? the kitchen, the staff, the volunteers ? I think it has opened their eyes to what this does for community and I certainly think it has opened my eyes to what I can be doing more after this experience for our family, this immediate experience, comes to an end, that I could be doing more.

?There are so many things people could be providing to an organization like this and the volunteers speak about how much it means to them and that, to me, is a pretty incredible combination. You feel the love going both ways and that means a lot to people in need people ? it's so comforting.?

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