



PRESS RELEASE: Volunteers, vital to the future of hospice Care and part of the essential care team - Pandemic or not

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The BC Hospice Palliative Care Association salutes the estimated 6,000 trained hospice volunteers during these challenging times who provide more than 209,470 (2019) hours of service to more than 120,000 clients and their families every year in BC.

“Hospice volunteers play an indispensable role in enabling hospice societies to offer the best care and support possible for clients living with life-limiting illness, their families and caregivers,” says BCHPCA President, Donna Flood. Interim Executive Director Pablita Thomas also adds, *“by sharing their time, energy, and expertise, volunteers bring compassion and caring to the lives of those in need.”*

The Conference Board of Canada (2018) estimates an hour of volunteer time in Canada to be worth \$27.00. At this valuation, hospice volunteers provided more than \$5.6 million worth of added value services in 2019 to our health care system, reports the BCHPCA.

Hospice Volunteers are required to complete a comprehensive training program consisting of over 30 hours of basic training before commencing their hospice volunteerism through a curriculum developed by the BCHPCA and the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. In addition, volunteers receive 20 hours of training annually related to their volunteerism, such as; self-care training, direct patient care, sitting vigil, respite care, companionship, facilitation of Advance Care Planning sessions for the public, and practical supports, that may include light housekeeping, errands, preparing snacks, etc.

These training opportunities are critical, allowing volunteers to develop the skills necessary to offer quality hospice care services to the vast number of clients served by hospice societies.

“This unique requirement reflects the vital role that volunteers play in the hospice philosophy of care and ensures a hospice program has roots deep in the community. Additionally, the value of time provided to the field is significant. Hospice Volunteers in BC have a high retention rate with an average length of engagement of 7 + years,” says Kevin Harter, Secretary-Treasurer of BCHPCA and CEO of Victoria Hospice.

Hospice volunteers often provide companionship and support to those receiving hospice care or provide respite care for caregivers. They can also assist with administration, raise awareness

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and contribute to educational programs, support grief and bereavement activities, provide fundraising support and much more. Hospice volunteers go above and beyond.

The service that volunteers provide to hospice societies in BC is essential and given the pandemic our world faces, hospice volunteers are critical in the delivery of services provided by hospice societies.

The role of the hospice volunteer is both rewarding and demanding. Volunteers provide a wide range of support services for clients and families, and these same volunteers can play a much-needed role in supporting our overburdened healthcare system.

The time is now for hospice volunteers to be deemed essential for the future of quality hospice palliative care and be recognized as essential positions during and post COVID19. Trained compassionate volunteers are the missing link to prevent people from dying alone and they are trained to provide grief and bereavement services to front line professionals while reducing the operational and direct care burdens that many face day in and out. COVID19 has widened the existing gaps in our healthcare system and the time is now to respond and lean on hospice societies. We have a responsibility to build a strong community support for the dying and grieving.

For the past thirty four years, the BC Hospice Palliative Care Association (BCHPCA) has been committed to supporting hospice palliative care in British Columbia. With the current pandemic and the ever changing landscape of service delivery, it is vital to ensure that volunteers, individuals and caregivers alike, are included and supported by our healthcare system. This will ensure the continuation of the compassionate care hospice volunteers provide to those nearing the end of life.

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About the association

BC Hospice Palliative Care Association is a not-for-profit, membership organization, which has been representing hospice societies, individuals and organizations committed to promoting and delivering hospice/palliative care to British Columbians since 1986. Our Members provide a broad range of services to British Columbians who are dying and to their loved ones who are grieving; BCHPCA Members deliver these services in all regions of the Province.

For more information

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