Fact Sheet for Hospice Volunteers

**What is hospice?** The purpose of hospice is to provide quality, compassionate support and care for people facing a life-limiting illness and their families. Hospice care is founded on the belief that, even when cure is no longer possible and time is measured in months or weeks, there is still an opportunity for quality of life, comfort, dignity, and hope. The care is provided by a trained team of health professionals and volunteers in the setting of choice (home, long-term care facility, hospital) supporting the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social needs of the patient while supporting family members throughout this difficult time. Hospice reaffirms the right of every person and family to participate fully in the final stage of life. Hospice care is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurance companies and is available to persons of any age, religion, or race.

**Q: What does a hospice volunteer in a nursing home do?**
A: A hospice volunteer is assigned to hospice patients residing in the nursing home just as one would be assigned to a home patient. The role of the volunteer is to provide companionship to the resident on hospice and to act as an advocate to assist in meeting the resident’s needs during their time together. Volunteer activities may include reading, praying, watching television together, taking a resident for a walk, listening while the resident reminisces, and just being a friend.

**Q: What skills are needed to be a hospice volunteer?**
A: No specific skills are needed other than having a giving heart, being a good listener, and offering a loving presence.

**Q: How much time must a hospice volunteer commit?**
A: This varies by hospice agency, but normally the volunteer can set his/her own level of commitment based on availability and the amount of time he/she is willing to give at any point in time. The hospice agency will work with you to accommodate your schedule and the requests of the nursing home resident.

**Q: Why are volunteers important?**
A: Hospice volunteers are an integral part of the hospice team. Volunteers provide a non-judgmental, loving presence to nursing home residents on hospice at an extremely vulnerable and often lonely time. Volunteers do not have to be there; they want to be. Volunteers often form close and special relationships with residents and families, and this bond can be an amazing gift to the dying resident. There can be a powerful sense of shared fulfillment.

**Q: How do I become a volunteer?**
A: Most hospice agencies conduct training for interested volunteers to ensure the volunteer’s comfort level with this role as part of the hospice team. Check with your local hospice to find out more about their volunteer program.