

## **Hospice: Big Hearts and Skilled Hands**

Good hospice work is being done every day but there are times when a Hospice Interdisciplinary team works together in a way that deeply touches everyone involved, demonstrating how the care and compassion hospice offers makes a lasting difference in the lives of individual's and those who love them.

Once during my employment with hospice, we served a man named Emilio, who had been married to his wife, Alicia, for 65 years. In those years they had never spent more than a night or two apart. While Emilio was under hospice care, Alicia was taken to the hospital for a serious lung infection. Her infection was treated but she grew weaker and weaker and when it became clear she would not recover she too was put on hospice service.

The couple's six adult children, and a score of grandchildren and great grandchildren, divided their time between visiting Alicia at the hospital and being with Emilio whose death was now imminent.

Emilio knew that he was dying. His deepest wish was to say goodbye to his beloved wife. But he was far too weak to get out of bed.

At the hospital Alicia whispered to her family members that she felt she should go home and see her husband right away, but she felt unsure that she was able to get into a car and make the trip.

The family members reported this information to the hospice nurse, who passed it on to the Community Education Representative, who passed it onto the Executive Director. Ambulance services are expensive and usually not part of hospice care. But this was a special case and the Executive Director got on the phone and made special arrangements to facilitate Emilio's dying wish to see his wife.

Within 2 hours Alicia was taken by ambulance to her home. Her gurney was wheeled into the bedroom and lined up beside the bed she and Emilio had shared for so many years. For the next 2 hours Emilio and Alicia lay beside each other again, too weak to speak, but holding hands. Then Emilio, who did not want his sick wife to see him dying, asked that she be taken back to the hospital. Alicia passed away that evening.

The family, who were anxious about delivering this news to Emilio, asked that the hospice Spiritual Care Coordinator come to the home and inform Emilio of Alicia's death. The Spiritual Care Coordinator did as they asked and she and the hospice Bereavement Coordinator spent time with several of the children and other family members who wanted to speak about what had happened.

Emilio died the next morning. The hospice RN and a CNA arrived to wash and dress him and help the family with details. Emilio and Alicia had a joint funeral and memorial service. Hospice staff attended the services, remarking on the powerful image of the two caskets entering the funeral home together.

The unhesitating communication, care and cooperation among the members of the hospice team gave Emilio, his wife and his family, an opportunity to witness again the love between this couple and created a beautiful and lasting memory for the family to ease the pain of the dramatic loss of both their parents.