

Supporting those living with chronic illness: Community collaborative brings return of vital service



By Mary Beth TeSelle

Palliative care can play a vital role for people facing a chronic illness or disease, helping with symptom relief, medication management, and the mental health issues that often arise. Locally, a new collaborative is ensuring that palliative care is once again available for those diagnosed with cancer in our community.

For someone living with a serious illness, managing symptoms, side effects and the impact the illness has on their quality of life can be overwhelming. Addressing issues that arise with medications or finding support for mental health issues can feel impossible. Often these problems simply go unaddressed.

That is where palliative care can help.

Palliative care is care that prevents or treats symptoms and side effects of disease as well as treatment. Palliative care also addresses emotional, social, practical, and spiritual problems related to illness. The goal of this type of care is to treat the whole person, not just the disease.

"As people live longer and live with chronic disease longer, the need for palliative care services is increasing," says Viv Tipton, Executive Director, Hospice of the Foothills. "It is necessary and needed in every community."

But for many communities throughout the country, palliative care services are not always readily available.

Locally, Hospice of the Foothills provided palliative care until 2019. However, staffing the service was not sustainable without additional support.

Now, after an absence of local palliative care services, several community partners are joining together to ensure those who need this care have access to it.

"Our community has pulled together to create a truly community-based

clinic that focuses on palliative care," Tipton says.

The new project, known as Sierra Community Palliative Care, opened in April of this year. It is made possible through a joint effort led by Hospice of the Foothills with support from Chapa-De Indian Clinic, Western Sierra Medical Clinic, Sierra Family Medical Clinic, private providers and Dignity Health Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital.

"There is a shared understanding that this care is essential to the health of our community and that together we can shoulder the burden of this care," Tipton says. "This cooperative approach is allowing us to serve our community in such a great way."

The new team includes a doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse navigator and a social worker. Providers from the partner clinics lend a hand by providing after-hours call services, which ensures that patients have access to care 24/7.

Currently, the team provides care to 20 patients, all with cancer diagnoses. In the future they hope to expand their services to other diagnoses.

Care is provided in a clinic that is currently open three days a week. Staff members may also make home visits and perform telehealth check-ins, when needed.

"Typically, our first visit is in the clinic, explains nurse practitioner Emma Winfield. "We discuss symptom management, whether those symptoms are related to the cancer itself or to the treatment. We also ask about any psychosocial or socioeco-

Contact Sierra Community Palliative Care

If you or someone you care about is currently diagnosed with cancer and could benefit from palliative care, call Sierra Community Palliative Care at 530-272-5011.

While the team is currently able to see only oncology patients, they hope to add patients with other diagnoses in the future. Those interested in future services are invited to call as well.

nomics that may be affecting their quality of life. We work with the patient to establish goals of care, based on what the patient wants and needs. Our goal is to always treat the patient as a whole person."

Winfield says follow up appointments depend on the patient's needs, but typically she may check in every two weeks either in person or by phone.

"We also provide patients with medication support," she explains. "If changes are made, I may check in with them daily for a while to see how they are handling that change. By providing this type of service, we are able to ensure patients don't need to go back to the Emergency Department unnecessarily or be readmitted to the hospital."

The goal for every patient cared for by Sierra Community Palliative Care team is simple: to see a positive change in their quality of life.

"I often share the story of a patient who came

to us in his late sixties, diagnosed with metastatic cancer," Winfield says.

"He was miserable — just spending his time sitting in his chair, in pain. We had a chat and he eventually opened up and shared that he was fearful of taking narcotic pain medication. I assured him that he had a legitimate reason to use these medications. Fast forward a month, and he came bounding into our clinic, feeling great and planning a fishing trip with his buddy. He felt great because I gave him permission to take his tab-

let and a half of pain medicine — and it changed his quality of life and allowed him to live again."

A remarkable impact, made possible by a remarkable community effort.

"What makes my heart sing is when I think about what we have created," Viv says. "It is not only addressing a serious need in our community, but it is bringing our community together. All of our boards, all of our doctors, all of our clinics. . . We are working together to help ease the suffering that we see in our community. And that is beautiful."

Things to Know

■ **Essential Tools for Caregivers Workshop**
The free Essential Tools for Caregivers Workshop series returns next month. Topics covered will include caring for the caregiver, community resources, elder care options, advanced planning, legal planning, and financial planning. This three-part program takes place on Sept. 8, 15, and 22 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at Eskaton Village. Free for family caregivers. Space is limited. Register at supportsierranevada.org/aopevents.

■ **2023 Barbara Schmidt Millar Triathlon**

Join the community in celebrating the farewell of the beloved Barbara Schmidt Millar Triathlon! Join us at the South Yuba Club on Sunday, Sept. 17 from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. for a farewell celebration and mini triathlon featuring an indoor swim, cycle, and run (outdoor option available if conditions permit). The triathlon is free for participants with a suggested donation. To bid adieu to this cherished event, we will have a day of fun festivities you won't want to miss. To register, visit supportsierranevada.org/newsandevents and click on BSM Triathlon.

■ **Transformational Wholeness, Body, Mind & Spirit**

Loving alternative approaches to healing for women with cancer or caregivers. Tuesdays 10-12:30. Register by Monday 6 p.m. Email for directions. Dr. Nanci Shander, drnanci@earthspiritcenter.com

What every birthday needs, party planners.

Choosing the right foods. Deciding on a safe exercise routine. Creating a birth plan. As a mom-to-be, you have a lot of planning to look forward to. Fortunately, Dignity Health – Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital's Family Birth Center has a team of specialists ready to safely guide you throughout your journey—from our state-of-the-art birthing suites, complimentary birth center tours and many of the comforts of home. We even have comprehensive virtual pregnancy and parenting classes to help you prepare for the big day.

Learn more about how we're delivering humankindness at DignityHealth.org/SierraNevadaBaby.

 **Dignity Health.**
Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital

Community invited to learn about Nordic pole walking

At this month's Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital Heart Health Support Group, attendees can learn about Nordic Pole Walking and the health benefits it provides.

The support group is free and meets the first Wednesday of every month. This month's session takes place on Wednesday, Sept. 6 at 2 p.m. in room 120, Building 3, on the Dignity Health Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital campus.

Meetings are open to anyone in the community interested in learning more about heart healthy living.

Dennis Maloney and Catari Lacorazza will be the keynote speakers at this month's meeting. Married for 29 years, the couple have been on a path to wellness for even longer than that. They've

been Nordic Pole Walking for ten years.

Nordic Pole Walking is a full-body workout, similar to cross country skiing. It can turn your walking program into a full body aerobic cross motor resistance function exercise.

It provides twice the benefits in half the time as regular walking. Nordic Pole Walking burns 600 to 900 calories per hour, compared to walking which burns 240.

More than ten million Europeans currently participate in Nordic Pole Walking. Hundreds of studies have shown the benefits that pole walking provides.

The support group meeting will include a question-and-answer session. For more information, contact the support group's co-leaders Don Attix (415.272.4528) or Linda (530.550.6407).

