

Never Too Late...to Listen

Warren Thompson

In my years as a caregiver with Hospice of Marion County, I have learned it is never too late to listen, support and care. It's never too late to listen to the interesting stories of our many beautiful patients, either in their own voice or in the words of family and friends. When a cure may be too late, it's never too late for the contentment a caring listener can bring. When families are divided, it's never too late to listen and encourage reconciliation and the peace it may bring. When fear and anger are raw, it's never too late to listen without judgment and to hear with our hearts.

Years ago one of my patients began pushing his family away. Earlier Chuck was at peace with his family and his faith. In listening to Chuck, he really wanted to be reconciled to his son. Separated from his son as an infant because of a divorce, Chuck had never known his son. With permission, a hospice volunteer helped locate the son in Galveston Texas. After a brief call, his son called and reconnected. Chuck learned he had two grandchildren. His son called back during the next few days. Listening and reconnecting meant so much to Chuck and in several days he said to his wife, "Wasn't it great that I found my son?" and he died peacefully.

Working as a team, many stories could be written of dreams that have been fulfilled. It is very rewarding to see patients and families' final wishes come true. This teamwork begins with listening. Years ago I received a gift from a patient in the form of a poem. I was able to listen and write down her poem, which has helped me and I have been able to share it with others.

"Ode to a Child"

By Elsie Simmons (1998 HMC Patient)

Who says my daughter's gone away?
Who says she isn't there?
I feel her presence every day.
I see her everywhere.
Not here?
I stretch my hand to stroke the face that was my pride;
And subtle as a whisk of smoke I feel her at my side.
And still those loving eyes invite me forth to field and hollow
'til suddenly she's lost in light where yet I may not follow.
But when someday as all must do,
I reach that distant land,
I know whose voice will guide me through,
Her hand within my hand.

The best gift we can give to our beautiful patients and families is the gift of listening.