In the midst of the noise and bustle and break of lights that consume care units at Stanford Hospital, about to get a new heart, Cindy Flynn was not afraid. It wasn’t the first time she’d been there. Twenty-six years earlier, then just 50 years old, Flynn had arrived at Stanford, pain gripping her chest. A heart attack, doctors told her. And the damage done meant she would need a trans- plant, stat. It was world-turning information.

Now, Flynn’s life was about to change again and a familiar face appeared. Father John Heeter, a tall, ruddy-faced man with a deep, calming voice full of warmth. “I was surprised,” Flynn said, but “I actually knew him from our history.” He had told her to be in the ward when he’d come in. “We prayed together and he gave me a lot of hope.”

Heeter knew that Flynn had a heart attack at age 50, and barely two days later, a heart transplant was her only option. During her stay at Stanford, her treatment was included with the hospital’s Spiritual Care Service. She had a chaplain assigned to her. “I was so glad,” Flynn said. “I mean, I won’t say I was happy, but I was thankful.”

Flynn’s story is not unique. When patients face life-altering medical challenges, they tend to look for someone to talk to — someone who can’t replace a nurse or a doctor but who can provide something else. “The Catholics did sacred music and the Protestants read from the Bible and made a prayer,” said the Rev. George Fitzgerald, DMin, director of the Spiritual Care Service since 1988. “Now we’re interfaith, and what we do is support and cooperation. Now we’re teachingervoices to be active listeners, and we never forget to try.”

“We’re not there to proselytize. We’re there to support. We’re there to understand, not force something on people.”

— Mike Flynn, volunteer, Stanford Spiritual Care Service

Underlying all these changes has been a broader acceptance of “spiritual” as a significant part of a person’s life and something that can contribute to health and healing.”

Fitzgerald said. “There are all kinds of studies that show that when patients have a supportive religious community, they tend to do better. And there are other studies that show that when chaplains visit patients, they tend to do better. Patients tend to do better. This service really means a lot to people,” she said, “and we’re very proud of it.”

The Spiritual Care Service’s clinical pastoral education program is certified by the Association for Pastoral Clinical Education and offers a year-long training or internship in spiritual care to students interested in working with medical patients.

The hospital’s Jewish Chaplaincy is directed by Bruce Feldstein, a former emergency medicine physician who is an adjunct professor of family medicine at Stanford and teaches a required class at the School of Medicine titled “Spirituality & Medicine in Medicine” and an elective class titled “The Healer’s Art.”

In the One on One program, volunteers under the supervision of the Rev. Susan Scott serve as compassionate companions by sitting with patients who are dying and alone.

For more information about all the Stanford Hospital Spiritual Care Service’s programs, call 650.723.3101 or visit stanfordhospital.org/spiritualcare.


www.youtube.com/stanfordhospital
Channel 30 Saturdays at 10:30 p.m. It can also be viewed at stanfordhospital.org/spiritualcare.

In 2010, Spiritual Care Services made 245,000 visits to patients, and its volunteers — from 12 countries, speaking 30 languages — gave 105,000 hours. Heeter knows well the difference these volunteers make. In the early days of his nearly four decades at the hospital, he might see as many as 80 people in a day, forget dating to eat or drink. Finally, he’d get home late at night. “Oh I’m fine,” said Heeter. “When you’re there, you should have your own doctor. What have you been doing?”

“That’s what I said,” Heeter said. “We’ve got to replicate this. We’ve got to replicate that and we’re there in more corners.”

Heeter said, “I have a buddy, a Buddhist, a Muslim, a diversity of Christians, who are the volunteers.”

They are in the ministry of presence — to totally open to the other human being, to be present. We train them to be respectful, to be reverent, to be gentle in every way so patients can tell us anything they want, how they want, or they can go alone. We’re there for them in that moment.”

“Steady support

Heeter and his colleagues try to anticipate when patients might be needed at weekly meetings with all the clinicians on a unit. “Sometimes they’ll say, ‘You’re going to go and meet with the family. We’re going to be giving him bad news and we need you to be there.’”

“Dedicated volunteers created the first-ever guidebook of its kind to train volunteers for Muslim spiritual care. Published in 2007, that guidebook does make a difference. It’s just having somebody there and talking to you as a person, and not just a patient.”

— Cindy Flynn, volunteer, Stanford Hospital & Clinics

Cindy Flynn didn’t have much doubt that she would be OK, but she does believe that she would have felt more pain and would have been more afraid if she knew so many of her peers were being told the same thing. “I just released myself so I could just concentrate on getting better. It truly does make a difference.”

“I don’t know how to explain it, but it does make a difference. It’s just having somebody there and talking to you as a person, and not just a patient.”

— Cindy Flynn, volunteer, Stanford Hospital & Clinics

The Stanford Hospital Spiritual Care Service program includes more than 200 volunteers in all 12 in the hospital’s operating rooms.

special feature

Stanford Spiritual Care Service

Serving Spiritual Needs

And Sharing the Knowledge

Stanford Hospital’s Spiritual Care Service is designed to provide the broadest possible resources for patients and their families.

Our services include:

• supportive visits by chaplains and volunteers to serve faith groups whether Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew, Muslim, Sikh and other options
• religious resources such as Bibles, Buddhist chaplain trees, Muslim prayer rugs, Shabbat candles and other prayer materials
• onsite observations of holidays including Christmas, Chanukah, Eid Al-Adha, Diwali, Hindu, and Buddhist
• memorial services
• an interfaith chapel open 24/7 that contains sacred writings and prayer books of many faith traditions
• trained volunteers from a variety of faiths

For more information about all the Stanford Hospital Spiritual Care Service’s programs, call 650.723.3101 or visit stanfordhospital.org/spiritualcare.


www.youtube.com/stanfordhospital

Channel 28 on Mondays at 8:30 p.m.; Tuesdays at 1:30 a.m. and Fridays at 8:30 a.m.; channel 30 Saturdays at 10:30 p.m. It can also be viewed at stanfordhospital.org/spiritualcare.

Stanford Hospital & Clinics is known worldwide for advanced treatment of complex disorders in areas such as cardiovascular care, cancer treatment, neuroscience, surgery, and organ transplants. It is one of the U.S. News & World Report’s “America’s Best Hospitals” and was ranked No. 1 in the San Jose Metropolitan area. Stanford Hospital & Clinics is internationally recognized for its clinical excellence and leadership in health systems innovation and has been acclaimed as the “hospital of the future” for the care of patients. The Stanford Medical Center is comprised of three world-renowned institutions: Stanford Hospital & Clinics, the Stanford University School of Medicine, the oldest medical school in the Western United States, and the Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital, an adjacent pediatric teaching hospital providing general acute and tertiary care. For more information, visit http://stanfordhospital.org/.

The Spiritual Care Service is the result of a generous gift from Loralie Klein, who serves as the chaplain for the Stanford Cancer Center.

It’s services include:

• an interfaith chapel open 24/7 that contains sacred writings and prayer books of many faith traditions
• trained volunteers from a variety of faiths

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