

My Day As A Hospice Aide

I started my day a little differently today. Instead of heels and skirt, it was sneakers and scrubs. What changed? My perspective! I agreed to shadow and assist two of our Hospice Aides at Hospice Care of South Carolina while they did their daily routine at Magnolias of Gaffney. We have several patients at Magnolias and Charlene Faison and Kathy Camp serve those patients each day. Today was the final day of National CNA appreciation week and what better way to honor those hard-working individuals than to walk a mile in their shoes.

I have to admit that I was very nervous about the day. We started with a wonderful lady who looked great after her daily hair styling session and some jewelry. Kathy was so gentle with her and you could tell that there was a bond between the two and an understanding of what the patient desired and the love with which Kathy did those things. It was beautiful to witness and to help.

After our salon visit, we went down the hall to see our next patient. She was so frail and still lying in the bed when we arrived. She needed help in order to get out of the bed each day and awaited assistance patiently. We moved her together to the wheelchair and then to her chair. She had only one request today; she wanted her fingernails painted. She managed to file them herself yesterday after having them cut, but with her weak body her hands shake and painting her nails is no longer something she enjoys. I sat beside her in the floor and we talked as I painted her nails a pretty coral color. You would have thought she had been at the spa all day. She was so pleased and thanked us over and over again. She is having pain today in her legs, but our few minutes together seemed to take her mind off of her pain, if only for a moment.

We then moved down the hall to assist with a bath for a man who recently lost his wife. He wasn't too happy about having a bath and even tried to convince us that we had already given him a bath. I watched Kathy gently coax him into allowing her to assist him with a quick shower and change of clothes for the day. She was amazing to watch as she was so respectful and allowed him to maintain his self-respect and dignity through the process.

Next I moved on to help Charlene with a dear Alzheimer's patient. Charlene understood how to work with this patient and he was so pleased to do whatever she asked of him. There were a few moments when he didn't want to cooperate, but that soon faded after a little further conversation. We often take for granted our privileges of going to the restroom when we feel the urge. I learned today that sometimes our bodies give in and we may not have that convenience anymore. It was amazing to see how Charlene assisted this sweet man to the restroom, never once asking him to throw out his dignity during the process.

It was soon lunch time and we moved to a patient who needs our help to eat. We went to the cafeteria to get her tray. While we waited for the kitchen to open we talked with the other residents in the dining hall. It's easy to make friends in this environment, so I'm sure it is hard on the Hospice Aides to see their friends pass on. After we received the lunch for our patient, we headed to her room. Our patient took her time eating and occasionally needed assistance. The Hospice Aide told me our patient was doing much better today. Most days her hands won't close well enough to feed herself, but today it's a little easier. After helping our patient with lunch, we met with the facility nurse to give her an update on the patients we had visited with that morning.

By the time we were done I was exhausted. It was 2:00 pm and I hadn't had lunch yet. I'm tired. My back hurts. I'm hungry and I've had an emotional day. This was one day for me and I didn't do ALL the things the Hospice Aides normally do every day. I walked away with a new appreciation for these wonderful caregivers who provide assistance for our loved ones. I pray daily for their strength to continue and hope they know how much they are appreciated.

That was one of the most challenging miles I have ever walked.

Submitted by: Amanda Knowles, Cherokee County



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