

HOSPICE OF NAPA VALLEY

*Napa, California*

Connections are part of our definition,” says Sarah Gorodezky, executive director of Hospice of Napa Valley (HNV), a community-based organization that has been providing palliative care to terminally ill patients and support services to patients and families since 1979. “We believe that our strength lies in finding community needs and meeting them.”

And that’s precisely what HNV has done, often in innovative ways. In 1997, HNV became the first private agency allowed to provide hospice services in a California Veterans facility — the Veterans Home in nearby Yountville. At the facility, HNV’s interdisciplinary team works closely with staff to help patients through the levels of care as their diseases progress. In addition, HNV recruits and trains Veterans Home residents to serve as hospice volunteers. They help with laundry, take patients for walks, or just sit by patients’ bedsides.

Another innovation is HNV’s connection to Napa State Hospital, which serves more than 1,000 patients with mental illness. In 1999, California designated a section of Napa State for forensic mentally ill patients — Napa State invited HNV to help create a hospice program.

The relationship is fraught with challenges: introducing palliative care into an institution more accustomed to aggressive care; and providing services in a non-judgmental way to people who may have committed terrible crimes.

Still, HNV continues to say yes to Napa State. “We knew we were pushing the envelope,” says Gorodezky. “We



knew that there would be special issues — especially the safety and security of our team. This relationship forces us to examine our own philosophies and values. But if we truly believe in our mission — to provide care to anyone in need — we have to find a way.”

Under the arrangement, Napa State refers to HNV appropriate patients, who receive hospice care on their home unit within the institution. HNV also provides in-service training for Napa State staff.

The impact has been profound, says Kathleen Province, coordinator of Napa State’s nursing policy and procedure committee. “There’s been a culture change. With the help of Hospice, our clients and staff are more comfortable when someone is dying. We’ve come to understand the value of empowering clients at the end of life. It’s an amazing difference.”

Responding to a community need for care of chronically and functionally impaired people, HNV created an adult day program. The program offers adult day health care for frail elderly and younger functionally impaired adults

who need help with personal and health care in order to remain as independent as possible.

In addition, HNV puts a great deal of energy into education, sponsoring end-of-life forums and classes for physicians, churches, service clubs, and health and human service organizations. HNV even reaches into schools, offering grief and bereavement support groups in elementary, middle and high schools in the Napa Valley Unified School District. “Kids who experience a loss may not have a way to process what they’re feeling,” says Jeanne Title, the district’s coordinator of preventive education. “Often, they turn to drugs and alcohol for comfort. HNV’s grief support program helps them feel that they’re not alone, and gives them an outlet for their feelings. This is a very valuable program. We’re glad they connected with us.”



INNOVATION HIGHLIGHTS

CONTRACTING WITH STATE AGENCIES

GRIEF/PERSONAL LOSS PROGRAMS IN ELEMENTARY AND HIGH SCHOOLS

ADULT DAY HEALTH, ADULT DAY SERVICES, ALZHEIMER’S DAY CARE PROGRAM