when the patient’s condition is stable it can make things more comfortable for the patient, the carer and the volunteer. It can be harder for the client and volunteer to work out how best to work well together if carer stress has already emerged.

If a problem arises between client and volunteer the Manager of Volunteers is the person to contact.

Bereavement Support

Some volunteers have been specially trained in bereavement support, and continue to offer support to family and friends after the patient has died. This may be by means of telephone or personal contact. The extent and duration of contact depends on the needs and wishes of the bereaved family, but it usually involves several visits at increasing intervals of time. Volunteers are trained to recognise and respond to the need of any client for professional bereavement counselling.

Other needs

If you have a need that is not described here, do raise the issue with the Manager of Volunteers or a member of the pc team, who will pass it on. Managers of Volunteers can often match volunteers with particular clients. An effort is made to respond to individual requests whenever possible.
What is a palliative care volunteer?

A palliative care (pc) volunteer is a vital, active and happy man or woman who has chosen to give time to assist the clients of palliative care services. Clients include patients, carers, and the patient’s family. Volunteers do what they do because they want to be there, and they want to help. Volunteers are of all ages, and a wide range of backgrounds.

What is the role of a palliative care volunteer?

The palliative care volunteer’s role is to strengthen the ability of the ill person to cope with life, to participate in as much as they can, and to live as fully as possible. Palliative care volunteers aim to support family in dealing with practical and emotional burdens and to assist them in coming to terms with bereavement.

Palliative care volunteers provide:

- practical help
- companionship
- comfort
- compassion

Volunteers are selected and trained by individual palliative care organisations, and are covered by the agency’s policies and insurance.

Training includes communication and listening skills and a basic understanding of living with a terminal illness, the dying process, bereavement, loss and grief.

Volunteers are trained in confidentiality and must adhere to ethical guidelines.

What is generally no cost to the client for volunteer services. Clients are not expected to give volunteers anything in return. Volunteers give their time freely.

Palliative care volunteers generally commit a regular time each week to the program. They may assist in a hospice or hospital setting, or with caring for people at home.

Patients and family members often feel more comfortable talking to someone who is not as emotionally involved as family and friends. Palliative care volunteers have the time to listen while people talk about their feelings in an open and unhurried way.

What palliative care volunteers do

Volunteers may be involved in:

- listening - ‘just being there’ for the ill person, for the main carer, and for other family members
- assisting with feeding and other care
- helping the patient to move around the house and to the toilet and bathroom
- transporting patients to and from appointments
- accompanying patients on outings
- facilitating shopping
- running errands
- assisting patients with writing and reading
- helping patients with their recreation and hobby activities
- giving the home carer a break by sitting with the patient
- preparing light meals and drinks
- providing contact with family and friends after the person has died

The volunteer also contributes to the patient’s care by being alert to their changing needs.

What palliative care volunteers don’t do

The palliative care volunteer does not:

- provide nursing care
- make decisions about the need for medication, or measure out doses
- do housework
- cook main meals
- provide intimate personal care
- lift the patient, although they may assist others to move the patient

Making contact with a volunteer

The patient or family can ask to be put in touch with a volunteer or a pc team member may suggest a volunteer, especially if the patient has no family, or when family members are fully stretched.

The Manager of Volunteers at the agency, the volunteer and the client jointly decide on the amount of contact. This is often a weekly visit of up to three hours. Contact usually increases during the course of the illness, and a second volunteer may be introduced to provide added support. Home carers in particular, are likely to face increasing stress and fatigue as the illness progresses. If clients and volunteers form a good relationship...