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Innovator 2016 - Autumn Edition: A Hospital with a Heart: The St. Joe's Community Makes A Difference

ICU team members Tom Piraino (left), Veronique Fleming (left) and Joanne Takaoka (right) help Mr. D. fulfill his wish of going outside. Along with his brother and partner (centre), Mr. D. was able to enjoy a sunny day while listening to his favourite music. This wish was made possible through a collaboration between the ICU team, Spiritual Care and Security & Environmental Services.

Having a family sing-along, renewing wedding vows, and reuniting lost family members – these are examples of how the 3 Wishes Project brings compassionate care to dying patients and their families in the intensive care unit (ICU).

The project began three years ago at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton with the goal of bringing peace to the last few moments of patients' lives. A set of three wishes generated by patients, families or clinicians were implemented by families and staff in the ICU with the hopes of achieving this goal.

Initially a pilot project led by Dr. Deborah Cook, a research publication published in the Annals of Internal Medicine demonstrated how the 3 Wishes Project improved the experiences of patients, families and clinicians in the ICU

and brought meaning to those involved at times of loss. The study noted how the project successfully implemented 98 of the wishes requested.

Additional research led by junior doctors indicated how residents found the project to re-engage humanism in their training. Clinicians in the ICU have found many expressions and experiences of spirituality in the high technology setting. After nearly 4 years, the 3 Wishes Project records show 630 wishes implemented and the average cost of a wish to be $20.

This special collaboration with practitioners from critical care, spiritual care and palliative care has since expanded to hospitals across North America. Collaborators France Clarke, Chaplain Feli Toledo, and Drs. Boyle and Wood have helped ICUs around the world to start similar programs. At St. Joe's however, community engagement has also been strong, as a number of departments are coming together to lend a helping hand.

Parking and Internal Transportation is supporting parking for the families of patients participating in this program. The Gift Shop is providing gifts such as flowers at cost. Tim Horton's is offering drinks and baked goods for families gathered in grief during their loved one's final hours. And Hospital volunteers are helping the clinicians to fulfill various wishes, particularly those involving activities outside the hospital.

"This project enables volunteers to play an important role in patient comfort and families in times of need," says Susan Zidaric Seymour, Director of Volunteer Resources & Retail Services. "Through the three wishes project, volunteers are making a direct impact on the care that patients receive."

Doreen Barrett, Manager of Tim Horton's at St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, says that the franchise is more than happy to help. "Since we're in the hospital, helping out with the 3 Wishes Project is a little thing that we can do to alleviate some of the stress that people are going through."

What started as pilot work developed into a demonstration project, and then a research study. Now the 3 Wishes Project is a vibrant collaborative clinical program to help personalize and dignify end-of-life care for patients, their families and the many professionals who care for them in their final days. Through initiatives such as the 3 Wishes Project, our hospital lives the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph's – going above and beyond to deliver compassionate care to those who need it most.

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