



Harvey and Carol Mehlhaff

## Hospice helps patients and families focus on living

Since April, retired Baptist minister Harvey Mehlhaff has laid in his hospital bed in his Snoqualmie Ridge home. He's paralyzed from the waist down due to the prostate cancer that he's been fighting for many years. His loving wife of 51 years, Carol, is by his side, making sure he's fed and cared for.

But Carol and Harvey aren't alone during the waning days of Harvey's life. They are surrounded by a team of medical professionals that makes sure all of Harvey's needs are met – physically, emotionally and spiritually. When Harvey's doctor told him in April that his cancer had progressed to a point where the treatments had stopped working, Harvey and Carol decided that they would accept his doctor's advice and bring in a team from hospice. This team from Providence Hospice of Seattle includes a nurse, social worker, home

health aide, and chaplain. They meet with Harvey and Carol at least once a week – and more frequently if needed. They help Carol care for Harvey and help Harvey deal with his pain, lack of mobility and fears about his future.

"I'm not a trained nurse," said Carol, recalling the time about a month ago when Harvey was in so much pain that she called upon hospice every day. "I learned this from the ground up. The fact that I knew that backup was there was calming for me and made me more calm being with him. If I hadn't had this backup I would have been beside myself and that would have translated to him."

Although patients are nearing the end of their lives, hospice helps the patient and family focus on living. For Harvey, that means continuing to study the scriptures every day. Born in North Dakota in 1936,

he knew from the time he was a young boy that he wanted to be a minister. Over the years Harvey led congregations in Lodi, Calif., Tacoma and Minneapolis. Even when he retired he would set up shop with his notes of biblical versus at the local coffee shop and chat with anyone willing to listen.

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Still fascinated by the biblical text, Harvey spends his days outlining and memorizing the Bible's versus and reciting them as he goes through the day.

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## Hospice helps patients and families focus on living (continued)

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He spends much time with his daughter and son-in-law, who moved in with him, and with his son and daughter-in-law and their two teenage boys, who visit regularly.

As a minister, Harvey has conducted hundreds of funerals and counseled the dying and their families. Still, he has his own questions.

“He’s not afraid of dying, but after experiencing all this pain, it’s the process of dying,” Carol said.

“It’s the process of crossing over. I don’t know what’s involved,” Harvey adds. But hospice is there to help. “With the products and professionalism they provide, our costs have dropped. There is the care. They’re there with you and assisting.”

Many Americans mistakenly think that hospice is a place you go when there’s nothing left to be done to treat an illness. That couldn’t be farther from the truth. Hospice care occurs where the patient lives and can improve the quality of living that remains. The hospice care team provides expert medical care, answers questions, offers advice on what to expect, helps families with the care giving duties, and provides emotional and spiritual support.

Research from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization has found that families report a better quality of life for a loved one who received hospice care. A study published in August in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that terminal cancer patients who began receiving hospice care immediately upon diagnosis not only were happier, more mobile and in less pain as the end neared, but also lived nearly three months longer than those who didn’t receive such care. Additional research demonstrates that hospice saves Medicare money.

But those are not the reasons for someone to choose hospice services. With the help of hospice, patients and families can focus on what’s most important – enjoying life together and living as fully as possible.

If you or a loved one is facing a serious or life-limiting illness, the time to find out more about hospice is now. For more information, contact Providence Hospice at [www.ProvidenceHospiceWashington.org](http://www.ProvidenceHospiceWashington.org).



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