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Fall 2016

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Celebrate the Veteran in Your Life During Their Life

During the Korean War, the U.S. Air Force used phosphorous flash bombs to illuminate the night sky for reconnaissance photographers. But that light turned reconnaissance planes into sitting ducks for enemy fire. When these photographers returned home, they weren't celebrated like World War II veterans, but thankfully weren't scorned like Vietnam War vets. Most Korean War vets simply felt forgotten.



UC Davis Hospice volunteers Randy Kanouse and Rose Castro, on the right, present a Certificate of Appreciation to a veteran receiving care from their hospice.

To ensure that hospice patients who served in the military get the end-of-life care, recognition and honor they deserve, the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and the Department of Veterans Affairs established the We Honor Veterans program. CHAPCA was an early partner on this program and led training throughout California to increase awareness of the special needs of veterans at the end of life.

CHAPCA continues to support hospices in their outreach to veterans by hosting quarterly calls with hospice and VA staff, and by sponsoring Veteran Awareness events around the state.

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Celebrate Veterans, cont'd.

This program provides resources to help hospices:

- Identify veterans upon admission.
- Assess unique needs related to their service.
- Determine if they and their family are entitled to VA benefits.
- Recognize, honor and thank veterans for their service.

The UC Davis Hospice asked one of their volunteers, veteran Randy Kanouse, to help them establish the We Honor Veterans program. "I welcomed the opportunity to meet and honor other vets for their sacrifice, bravery and courage," said Randy.

Celebrating the memories and experiences of veterans

Randy, who recently was honored with CHAPCA's Gift of the Heart award for his exemplary volunteer work with veterans, spends four to five hours over several visits talking to a patient about their military service. He learns more by researching their unit's history, aircraft or ship. Once he's filled in the details, he writes a 20-30 minute speech for a recognition ceremony.

"Before going to their home for the ceremony, I read the speech a few times to memorize the details," he says. "I want to look at the vet and their family during the speech, not at my notes."

Randy brings an 8 foot U.S. flag on a flag pole to the ceremony. "The flag is so important to all veterans as it symbolizes our nation and everything the veteran served to protect," said Randy. During the ceremony, Randy presents the patient with a service pin and certificate of appreciation while a photographer captures the moment.

It's not uncommon to have a few dozen family members and friends at a ceremony. "Families enjoy hearing the facts but I add details of their bravery and sacrifice to help them see how noble their loved one is," he said.

Veterans often reveal things to Randy that their family never knew about. "These veterans are close to the end. They're anxious to share their stories and willing to open up about what they experienced and how they feel about it."

Randy learned that the Korean War reconnaissance photographer had no family. Only one friend and two hospice volunteers attended his ceremony. "Yet, he was beaming with pride and joy to have his story told," said Randy. Don Lewis, LCSW, Bereavement & Volunteer Coordinator at UC Davis Hospice, said, "Randy brings immeasurable honor and dignity to our patients' lives by sharing their legacy with their families and loved ones."

Thanking those who have never been thanked

After learning about the We Honor Veterans program, Arlene Stepputat, Manager of Volunteers at the Visiting Nurse and

Hospice Care (VNHC) of Santa Barbara, contacted volunteer Scott Eschbach to see if he would help her get it started. "Like hospice volunteering, once you identify something you feel called to, you must do it," said Scott.

Unlike most VNHC volunteers who help out 3 hours a week, Scott volunteers for 8 hours a day, 3 days a week at VNHC's in-patient Serenity House. "In all he does, Scott embodies the essence of service," said Arlene. "As a veteran working with patients who are also veterans, that common bond of duty, honor and service opens the pathway for connection and deepens the mutual respect and understanding."

Scott visits new patients soon after their admission to start establishing rapport. During the initial assessment, the social worker finds out if the patient is a veteran. Scott is alerted and talks to the family about scheduling a recognition ceremony.

During the ceremony, Scott presents the patient with a certificate, a patriotic lap quilt made by a member of the Coastal Quilters Guild and a pillow facsimile of an American flag made by one of his friends. "We're proud of the patient's service and want people to know that," said Scott. "Upon walking into the room, staff can see that this patient is a vet and can thank them for their service."

The recognition and appreciation by VNHC staff and volunteers that these veterans experience at the end of their lives often makes up for not having been welcomed home or thanked for their service earlier in life. "It's our last chance to do that for them," said Scott.

Honor and share the stories of the veteran in your life

Too often, honor and recognition for a veteran is only heard at their memorial service. "Why wait until people pass on to honor them," said Randy. "We should do it while they're alive."

If a veteran in your family is nearing the end of their life, Scott suggests telling them that you're proud of their service and would like to know more about it, if they feel comfortable sharing that experience with you. "But, don't push them until they're ready to talk about it," he said. "For some vets, there are deep wounds they don't want to surface again. Others will be delighted to talk about it."

"Every year, we celebrate Veterans Day with many programs to recognize and thank our veterans," said Randy. "But, we rarely recite the story of a single person and offer them our gratitude for their sacrifices, determination and commitment." Follow the example of volunteers like Randy and Scott: gather friends and family to celebrate the story of the veteran in your life while they're still alive to appreciate it.

Deirdre Reid is a writer based outside Raleigh, NC. Find her online at deidrereid.com.

Celebrating Veterans

Celebrating veterans while they are alive is a core component of the We Honor Veterans program. Volunteers coordinate the celebrations, gathering friends and family to honor the patients and to deliver a Certificate of Appreciation. Each veteran has a story to be told. If a patient has no family, hospice volunteers are honored to be part of the ceremony.

To see more pictures of these celebrations, please visit our Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/CAHospicePalliative/>.





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Thank You to Our Veterans

On November 11th, Americans across the country celebrate Veterans Day, a special day to salute the men and women who have bravely served our country in the military.

These fellow Americans have made profound sacrifices in defense of freedom and they deserve our heartfelt thanks and appreciation. Honoring our nation's Veterans includes supporting them throughout their entire lives, especially at the end.

As a partner with the **We Honor Veterans** program, the California Hospice and Palliative Care Association is committed to increasing Veterans' access to the compassionate, high quality care available from the nation's hospice and palliative care providers.

There is something else that's important for every American to do – and that is to say, “thank you” to our country's Veterans. Not just on November 11, and not just in November, but all year long.

Ask your friends, neighbors, coworkers and others in your community whether they have served in the military (you may be surprised how many have)—and thank those who have served for their sacrifice.

It surprises many Americans to learn that every day, 1,800 Veterans die. That's more than 680,000 Veterans every year – or 25 percent of all the people who die in this country annually.

If you know a Veteran who is in need of the special care hospice and palliative care brings to people facing serious and life-limiting illness, please reach out and help them learn more about care options. Information is available from Caring Connections at www.caringinfo.org or by calling the HelpLine at 1-800-658-8898.

To all our nation's Veterans, thank you.

