LETTER FROM THE CHIEF

THIS FALL, healthcare reform remains a major concern for the US, and more and more, palliative care is being offered as one part of the solution. “Dying in America,” a study recently released by independent experts at the Institute of Medicine, concludes that improved care for patients at the end of life is paramount. The 507-page report calls for increased training in palliative care as well as transformation of our medical system to allow for greater access to palliative care for patients faced with serious illness.

The Palliative Care Division at MGH is proud to be on the forefront of providing both palliative care training and clinical leadership in this growing field. At the start of a new academic year, our Division continues to play an active role in teaching learners spread throughout MGH. This year we will expand our curriculum for learners in the Medical ICU, the Cardiac Care Unit, the Oncology service, and for Internal Medicine residents in both inpatient and outpatient settings, as well as teaching at Harvard Medical School, reaching medical students as they are just beginning to form their practices and plans for the future. We believe it is crucial that they learn early on about palliative care – the holistic attention to psychological, emotional, spiritual, and symptomatic needs.

Aside from our teaching within the hospital and medical school, we have continued to grow in our community impact. You will read more in this issue about our work with the Comfort Zone Camp, a nonprofit bereavement camp transforming the lives of children who have experienced the death of someone close to them.

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AT THE FOREFRONT: VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TAKES FLIGHT

THE PALLIATIVE CARE DIVISION at Massachusetts General Hospital is pleased to celebrate one year of service with its Volunteer Program for patients who are hospitalized and involved with our Palliative Care physicians, nurse practitioners, or social workers. There are four volunteers (who have completed a twelve hour training and four hour orientation) who are incredibly valuable members of our Palliative Care Team. These dedicated volunteers are able to provide companionship to patients who may benefit from an extra layer of support.

The program, spearheaded by one of our Palliative Care Social Workers, Lynn Mazur, LICSW, has developed in leaps and bounds over the past year. The role of the volunteer may vary, based on what that particular patient and family needs most, but may include being a friendly visitor or peer without an agenda, bringing kind attention, listening, reading to the patient, or offering family members respite. In addition, patients can receive assistance with letter-writing, transport to the Healing Garden or to enjoy a break outdoors. The team sees volunteers as an extension of the Palliative Care Division, helping to further understand the patient's needs and wishes.

The results so far have been resoundingly positive. Volunteers have been involved with nearly 150 patients and families. One patient reported to his nurse, “That lady yesterday, she cheered me up, she took me down memory lane – we talked about dim sum. She made my pain much better, better than medicine.”

Another patient said, “It’s easy to get lonely when you’re just waiting to die. It can feel like no one cares. But when your volunteer comes, then I know that someone cares about me.”

In another visit, the volunteer learned a patient’s favorite musician was Tony Bennett and, collaborating with a chaplain intern, brought a CD that the surprised and grateful patient played constantly.

The volunteers span a wide range of ages and backgrounds, but all share a desire to comfort and provide support to the seriously ill and their families. Cam Sutter is our very first volunteer who helped develop the training curriculum. When she’s not a volunteering, Cam is a Child Life Specialist who provides emotional support for hospitalized children.

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LETTER FROM THE CHIEF
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We also look ahead with great anticipation to the 4th Annual Robert Leffert, MD, Memorial Lecture, featuring Diane Meier, MD, Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC), a national organization devoted to increasing the number and quality of palliative care programs in the United States. Her talk is titled “Palliative Care Futurist: Matching Care to Our Patients’ Needs.”

We believe so strongly in palliative care and what we have to offer patients and families that we are committed to training leaders in the field and providing quality palliative care not only within our own healthcare system and community, but also the world at large. This issue exhibits a new feature of the newsletter, the International Corner. It is heartbreaking for our team to see the paucity of palliative care available internationally, and we are committed to using our team’s education, talent, and resources to benefit the global community that is in such desperate need.

As we share with you the ways in which we’ve grown and developed over the past year, and the ways in which we plan to continue extending our reach as leaders in the world of palliative care, we want to say a heartfelt thank you, as we would never be able to do this work without the support of our friends, colleagues, and donors.

Vicki Jackson, MD, MPH
Chief, Division of Palliative Care

— VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TAKES FLIGHT
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Bill Crane, an attorney and retired administrative law judge, has been a volunteer in hospice houses and nursing homes for more than 10 years before joining our team. He is very involved in meditation in the Buddhist tradition, an added benefit he brings to interested patients.

Jessica Noggle is a PhD research fellow in Medicine who is now pursuing a future as a Nurse Practitioner. She is a musician, a reiki practitioner, and a yoga instructor when she’s not busy as a student or research scientist.

Caitlin Gauvin is a 2012 graduate of UMass/Amherst who has been working in a genetics group assisting in research. Her experiences with our volunteer program will continue to shape her future as she finalizes applications to medical schools.

To our knowledge, there is only one other hospital in the United States that runs a successful Palliative Care Volunteer Service for inpatients. We feel very grateful for the success of MGH’s Palliative Care Volunteer Program and are hopeful for its continued growth, daily living out the volunteers’ mission statement:

“As part of the Palliative Care team, we will create a human space for patients ... to find, to enjoy, to be heard, to be quiet, to grieve, and to experience ... as they may choose.”

PALLIATIVE CARE HONOREES

On June 5th, the MGH Department of Medicine awarded Todd Hultman, NP, with the 2014 MGH Nursing Award. The award, which is chosen annually by the Department of Medicine Residents, honors an individual who exemplifies the role of a clinician-educator and goes above the call of duty to provide the highest quality patient care. Furthermore, the award highlights the importance of the nurse-resident collaborative relationship at MGH. Todd was chosen among a competitive pool of nursing colleagues at MGH, and becomes the first individual at MGH to have been honored with the award on three separate occasions (2010, 2011 and 2014).

Additionally, Christina Kim, NP, and Vicki Jackson, MD, were recently selected as honorees for the MGH Cancer Center’s The One Hundred. The annual program, which was inaugurated in 2008, honors the 100 leading organizations and individuals who are at the forefront of cancer research, treatment, and patient advocacy. The recognition of two Palliative Care team members speaks to the remarkable talent and dedication of our clinicians.

Please join us in congratulating Todd, Christina and Vicki on these well-deserved honors!
ON JULY 19TH, COMFORT ZONE CAMP, in collaboration with MGH, hosted a one-day bereavement program for children and their families at the MGH Institute of Health Professionals (IHP) campus in Charlestown, MA. The one-day event was the culmination of a year’s worth of diligent planning by Todd Rinehart, LICSW, ACHP-SW, a Clinical Social Worker in the Palliative Care and Social Services Departments of MGH. A nation-wide organization, Comfort Zone Camp offers a variety of programs focused on supporting children ages 5-17 who have recently experienced the loss of a parent, sibling or primary guardian. Events can range from one to four day programs, and are structured to help both children and their parents build competency around grief and mourning. Furthermore, programs support children in rebuilding confidence, reestablishing a sense of control over certain aspects of their environment, and creating friendships and connections which outweigh the sense of loss for the child. Comfort Zone Camp often collaborates with independent organizations, such as MGH, to leverage their program development expertise with the preexisting communities within these organizations.

Rinehart first learned of the organization while attending the 2010 American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine conference in Boston, where a Social Worker colleague presented their work with Comfort Zone Camp, and encouraged him to become involved with the organization. Since then, Rinehart has been actively volunteering for one-day and weekend-long programs in New York, Chicago and on Cape Cod. In 2013, he approached his colleagues at MGH about the possibility of hosting a one-day event for children. With the generous support of the Social Service, Palliative Care, Pediatric Palliative Care, and Patient Care Services Departments at MGH, the inaugural event became a reality this past July.

Early on the July morning, parents and children began filtering into the IHP Campus, which overlooks Boston Harbor and the Charlestown Navy Yard. “I remember watching the children and parents coming in, being struck by how much courage they displayed” recalls Rinehart. More than 30 children were individually matched with “Big Buddies”, who had themselves experienced the loss of a loved-one in their lifetimes, and could support, comfort and empathize with the children throughout the day. The event began with icebreaker games, where children could get to know their Big Buddy and fellow campers, followed by a Big Buddy share, where a Big Buddy would share their experience of loss with the attendees and allow children to ask questions or relate to the experience. From there, the event broke into six “Healing Circles,” which were small group sessions facilitated by Licensed Clinical Social Workers. While in a “Healing Circle,” children are encouraged to share their experience with loss and to lend support and encouragement to their peers’ individual coping process. To conclude the event, children and their families were reunited for a memorial service, where they could support one another in the sharing of favorite memories of loved ones who had died. Rinehart remembers a colleague sharing how “seeing the kids come in nervously in the morning and leave laughing in the evening” spoke volumes to the event’s remarkable impact on the children.

Moving forward, Rinehart hopes to build off of the success of the day by making it an annual event at MGH. Throughout the year, volunteers and attendees can stay connected to Comfort Zone Camp through an array of options, including 5k road races, bi-annual camps held on Cape Cod, and various charitable events. Readers interested in becoming involved or learning more about Comfort Zone Camp are encouraged to visit www.comfortzonedcamp.org or www.hellogrief.org. You may also contact Mr. Rinehart at trinehart@partners.org or 617-724-4525 for further information.
INTERNATIONAL PALLIATIVE CARE CORNER

AT MGH, WE BELIEVE SO STRONGLY IN PALLIATIVE CARE and what we have to offer patients and families that we are committed to providing quality Palliative Care and training leaders within our own medical system and community, as well as the world at large. In this corner of each newsletter, we will feature the efforts of one of our many Palliative Care Team members who have donated their time to spreading the mission of Palliative Care to the underserved internationally.

In this issue, we are highlighting the work of Catherine Liberles, RN, triage nurse for Inpatient Palliative Care at MGH, who travelled to Portugal this past April to attend the International Conference on Palliative Care in the Azores as a plenary speaker. Catherine was able to speak about the benefits of early access to Palliative Care, as well as some of the cost benefits to the conference attendees (over 150 physicians, nurses, and business people interested in developing Palliative Care in their country).

Catherine was also able to use her experience as a triage nurse at MGH, where she plays an active role growing and shaping our consult service, to speak to the Palliative Care team in the Azores about developing their service, which is in its infancy. She notes, “When I reflect back on how fast our service at MGH has grown and how many people we reach, it’s mind-boggling.”

Maintaining that perspective was critical when helping the Palliative Care providers in the Azores, a truly grass-roots effort staffed largely with volunteers. Catherine was able to meet with the President of the University of the Azores as well as the mayor of the city, to strategize about developing a sustainable Palliative Care Team, as well as appearing before the local media to spread the word about Palliative Care.

Having worked in Haiti for 7 years to help start and maintain a free-standing medical clinic, Catherine was already highly experienced in advocating for underserved populations. That initial collaboration sparked in Catherine the desire to give back to those in need, which she feels she is able to do on these international trips, as well as every day in her work in Palliative Care at MGH.

SAVE THE DATE:
The 2014 Leffert Lecture will be held on Wednesday, December 3rd at 4:30pm in the O’Keefe Auditorium at MGH. This year’s distinguished speaker will be Diane Meier, MD, Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC). The topic is “Palliative Care Futurist: Matching Care to Our Patients’ Needs.” To register, please email mmspinale@partners.org or call our office at 617-724-9197.

WAYS TO GIVE
For information about ways to support the Palliative Care Division at Mass General, please contact Wendy Lennon at 617-724-6432 or wlennon@partners.org.