

HOSPICE HOME SUPPORT appeals for volunteers to help people die with dignity at home

Are you a good listener?

Could you offer practical and emotional support?

Could you spare a few hours a week?

In Britain today we don't talk much about death, so here's a challenge: think about your own death for a moment.

Let's hope it's many years away, but when the moment comes, what do you want?

Most people want to be free of pain. They want to be treated with dignity and respect; and they want to be with family and friends in a familiar place. Most people would like to die in their own homes – but only 18% do so.

Hospice Home Support (HHS) was set up to make it easier for people with a life limiting illness to stay in their own homes, and perhaps to die there. Affiliated to the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice in Farnham, HHS volunteers visit terminally ill people in their homes. They cannot replace the experts, the doctors, nurses and trained carers who treat the illness, manage pain and symptoms and help with every day tasks like washing and dressing.

What volunteers give is time. It's only two or three hours a week, but with that time they can offer a listening ear, help with odd jobs, and provide a break for full-time carers. Just a few hours a week can make all the difference to someone who is seriously ill, and to their family. Tom said, "My volunteer became a true friend visiting me each week and taking me for my many hospital appointments. It was good to have his support and transport from door to door."

Often a volunteer who is new to the family and does not know what has gone on before is someone people can talk to, receiving support and knowing that what is discussed will go no further. One of our patients, Ruby always looks forward to going out with her volunteer to the shops or the garden centre. Ruby feels she can say anything to the volunteer as her illness gets worse in complete confidence. "She has become a true friend," she says.

Work with dying people might not sound a bundle of laughs – yet it can be, and volunteers always say that it is rewarding and fulfilling. It is varied too. You could have an old person who enjoys looking back on a long life filled with action and incident, a more reserved person who derives comfort as they gradually open up and share long-buried worries, or a man in his thirties with a wife and children.

This is important support, and we always need new volunteers, men and women, who can spare a few hours a week during the daytime. You will be trained before your first visit to a patient. You will learn how to listen; you will be taught about palliative care and bereavement; and how to assess the effects of your work on patients, carers, and perhaps most importantly, yourself.

You will have a support network of fellow volunteers and trained supervisors, and monthly meetings where you can share experiences and discuss fears and problems.

Does this sound like something you could help with? If so, or simply to get more information, telephone Linda on 01276 707571, or come to our open information evening at the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice, Waverley Lane, Farnham at 7.30pm on Tuesday 9th February 2010.