

# **“No Veteran Dies Alone”**



**67<sup>th</sup> VAVS NAC Meeting**

**Beverly Leneski**

**March 6, 2013**

# Palliative Care

**“The active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social, and spiritual problems, is paramount.**

**The goal of palliative care is achievement of the best quality of life for patients and families.”**

# USA Statistics

- **2.4 million die per year**
- **90% deaths occur due to chronic illness**
- **70% patients wish to die at home**
- **50% die in hospital**
- **25% die in nursing home**
- **20% of terminally ill die following admission**
- **25% die in hospice or Palliative Care**



# Overview of No Veteran Dies Alone (NVDA)

- provide companionship and assistance
- “fill in” and provide constant comfort at bedside
- ensure that no one faces the challenge of death alone

# **Responsibilities of NVDA volunteers**

- **Holding the Veteran's hand**
- **Talking to the Veteran**
- **Providing additional support to family members**
- **Reading to the Veteran**
- **Playing music**
- **Assisting in making the Veteran comfortable**
- **Soft touch hand massage (requires completion of training)**
- **Prepare/get snacks as allowed**

# Required Training

- **Palliative Care Specific Training (from interdisciplinary team consisting of Social Worker, Nurse Manager, Chaplain, and Physician)**
- **Voluntary Service General Orientation**
- **Quarterly Chat with Chaplain (de-briefing)**
- **Quarterly trainings with Palliative Care staff**



# **Scheduling Volunteers**

- **Excel spreadsheet – text message, e-mail or telephone**
- **Added to Google Calendar Mail Group**
- **Automated call system**

# **When death occurs**

- **Choose words carefully – focus on what will give the family the most comfort**
- **Veteran placed on a special stretcher with a flag draped over the top**
- **TAPS played**
- **Accompany to morgue**



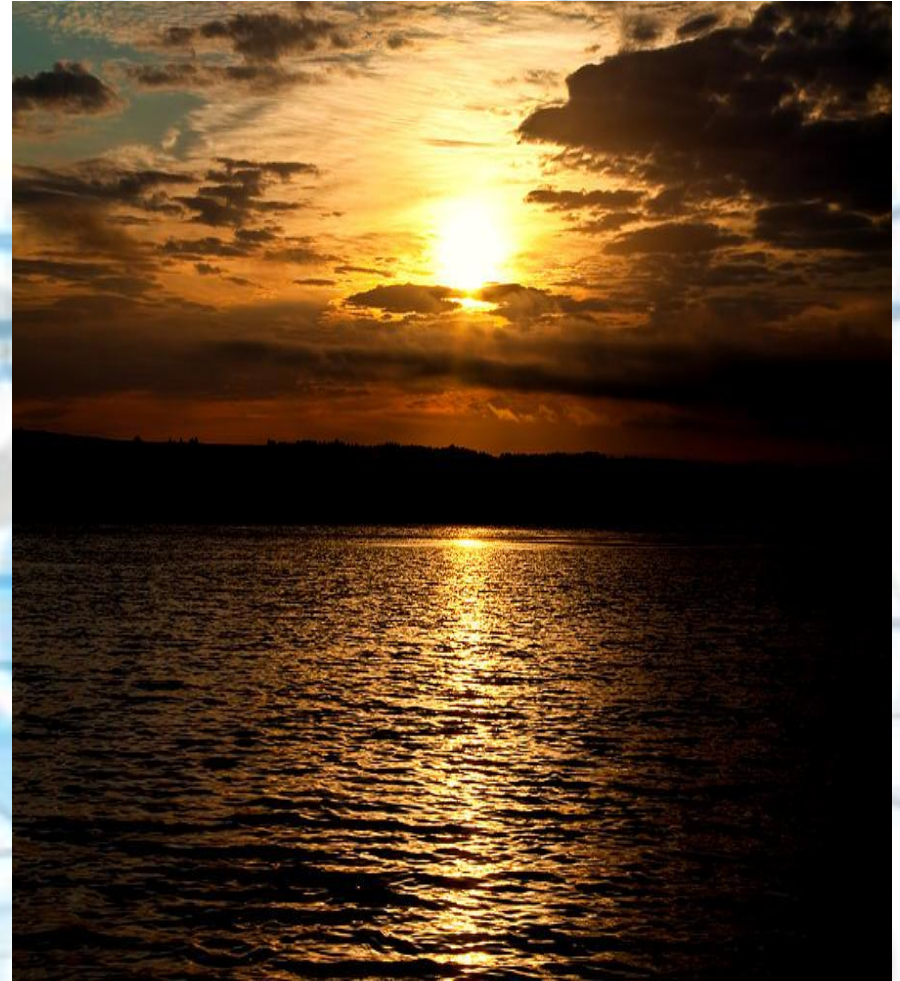
# **Uniqueness of program**

- **Life changing for volunteers**
- **Requires special person**
- **Diverse group of volunteers**

Volunteers presence in a  
Palliative Care Program is the  
Greatest gift to give one another.



**“When I’d leave a few minutes before 1:00 a.m. utterly exhausted and feeling guilty about not staying, I’d realize that one of you would be here at 1:00 a.m. and it was such a relief.” Family member about NVDA volunteers**





**“You make time for good causes. You hug them, you hold them and you reassure them that they aren’t going to take it alone.”**



**“The number of times that I have received hugs from random strangers is really remarkable. For NVDA our goal is to be there when family can’t. The families are just so grateful that their loved one is not alone—that the volunteers are with them if something happens.”**

**“NVDA Volunteers**



**Honor Veterans'  
Preferences for Care  
At the End of Life**