

**Emerita Foust**  
**2011 Valuable Volunteer Award Winner**

Nominated by: Dana Toth - Odyssey Hospice

You may encounter Mary and never know it. You would probably assume that she is a family member of one of the residents of Sandpiper SNF, or if you saw her at the nurse's desk conversing, she might have you believe that she works there. In fact, Mary is a hospice volunteer with Odyssey, and has been visiting residents at Sandpiper who receive hospice services for approximately 9 months.

Until last week, Mary had been visiting 4 hospice patients (1 person died), on a weekly basis. Mary was assigned to visit these particular residents for "socialization and companionship", which are the terms used when completing a volunteer assignment, however, Mary does so much more than that. I have come to learn that Mary is creative in her interaction with those she visits, and my intention is to have her pass this talent onto other volunteers.

Socialization for people in a nursing facility is critical, especially when it comes to those with a terminal, sometimes debilitating, illness. Staff and family members worry about the resident who is not able (or willing) to get out of their room and be around other people. This is where someone like Mary comes in. She goes into a patient's room and listens to their stories, their hopes, and addresses their needs. She consoles them when they may be discomforted by their current situation; she listens to their concerns and addresses their needs; she also investigates their personality to determine what special touches she may add. Mary also uses her experience as a caregiver for her elderly parents and her knowledge from working in the healthcare profession to openly communicate with staff involved in the plan of care, and to best advocate for the patient.

For one particular patient, Mary was known to frequent the Unit Nurse's desk to ask for Ensure to give to the patient, as she noticed that they were dehydrated. Mary would push the person around in their wheelchair as they consumed the entire contents of the Ensure bottle. For this same patient, Mary applied lip balm to their dry lips, and tracked down the facility beautician when the patient noted that she needed a haircut. Mary also contacted the daughter during or after visits to relay any important information regarding the patient's condition. Mary also continually updated the hospice on suggestions for improving the quality of the patient's daily life. This patient died last week, and I have no doubt that they were peaceful and comfortable due, in part, to the attention they were given by Mary- it may also be reasonable to say that Mary helped this person live longer than they may have had without the extra attention.

If you are fortunate to witness Mary playing games with residents, pushing them in wheelchairs, or giving encouraging words as they sit in their room, you will be a witness to the value that she brings to the nursing home residents.