

Pat Porterfield

Retired Registered Nurse
Vancouver Coastal Health

Palliative care is an area of nursing that requires not only great knowledge, but also a great deal of wisdom and compassion.

Retired Vancouver Coast Health Regional Leader of Palliative Care Pat Porterfield possesses these qualities in abundance and has helped train countless nurses in the essential art and science of relieving the pain and suffering of patients.

Beginning as a nurse in the 1970s and transitioning into a mental health nurse clinician role at Lions Gate Hospital in North Vancouver in 1981, Pat went on to become an award-winning palliative care specialist, project coordinator, professor and researcher. The common thread of patient dedication runs through her career, as illustrated by this story:

“One day while on our way to a meeting at the hospital, Pat and I passed a family sitting in the hallway and Pat recognized the patient as someone referred to the palliative care system,” recalls Betty Davies, RN. “Pat stopped and introduced herself and assessed the patient’s physical and emotional symptoms, while also attending to the patient’s spouse who was distraught. Pat gained their trust, reassured them that something could be done, suggested a plan of action and went to arrange for care. Still standing at a distance, I heard the woman exclaim to her husband, ‘Now that’s what I call having a prayer answered! That woman knows what she was doing.’ In her clinical work, Pat’s extensive knowledge and skills were the answer to many prayers.”

Pat work contributed substantially to the health of the general public as she integrated practice support tools and models of nursing care delivery in palliative care. Specific initiatives included examining who needs a palliative approach in the



acute sector, deployments of palliative medication kits, clinical guideline development, caregiver education and support, hospice standards and design and strategic projects in the region.

“Pat has strengthened the palliative care practice of many nurses, physicians and other health care providers through practice and mentorship,” says Fraser Health Authority Hospice Palliative & End of Life Care Director Carolyn Tayler. “Her compassion and steady, sensible manner helped patients make difficult transitions in times of crisis.”

Pat continues to facilitate improvements to palliative care through current collaborative research as she shares her knowledge and expertise freely with the research team. She has contributed to numerous publications in the field of palliative care and was co-investigator or lead investigator on numerous well-funded research studies. As well, her personal efforts have led to a steady stream of funding for educational events for all levels of nursing care.

Pat’s excellent interpersonal relationships and communication skills have helped pave the way for better research and hands-on palliative practice. “Her style of communication always left the patient or their family with a better understanding of the situation, leaving them feeling empowered and with a sense of hope,” says Family Nurse Practitioner Barb Eddy. She leaves a legacy of compassionate care to inspire nurses now and in the future.



AWARD OF DISTINCTION

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