



# IN TOUCH

*Physician Newsletter*

Comfort and dignity as life nears its end

FALL 2018

## PALLIATIVE CARE RECOGNIZED FOR INNOVATION

Hospice of the Valley has received the prestigious 2018 Circle of Life Award, given by the American Hospital Association for creating unique home-based palliative programs that care for people dealing with advanced, chronic illness—but not yet ready for hospice.

“We share this honor with community physicians and healthcare systems that support our mission to improve quality of life for seriously ill patients who need care,” said Ned Stolzberg, executive medical director, Hospice of the Valley. “Our collaboration creates a safety net for these patients and their families.”

The Hospice of the Valley programs cited by the association include:

- Arizona Palliative Home Care (AZPHC), which partners with hospitals, healthcare providers and insurance companies to focus on patients at high risk for hospitalization, serving more than 500 patients a day in their homes.
- Transitional Care (AZPHC), bridging the gap for medically fragile patients leaving the hospital for home.
- Palliative Care for Dementia, supporting loved ones with dementia and their caregivers from diagnosis through end of life.

The award selection committee was especially impressed with AZPHC’s community partnerships and relationships with community physicians and insurance companies. As a result of these collaborations, the agency’s hospitalization rate is less than 1 percent.

“Our interdisciplinary teams spend time with patients at home, identifying the unmet needs that in some cases keep patients cycling into the hospital,” said Gobi Paramanandam, MD, director of AZPHC. “The teams also discuss goals of care, and there’s no better place to do that than in someone’s living room.”

Let us know how we can support you: (602) 695-9822.



Palliative care nurse Martha Cocoros visits her patient.

## MECHANICAL PETS BRING JOY TO DEMENTIA PATIENTS

To experience the love of a pet is to know unconditional love. They don't judge, play mind games or hold a grudge.

So it's no surprise that pets calm and soothe dementia patients, who are losing their understanding of the world around them. It's frightening to forget where you are—to wonder why a perfect stranger is talking to you about things you don't remember. Holding a pet and stroking its fur brings a familiar comfort.

But because a real animal won't sit obediently for hours on end, Hospice of the Valley utilizes very special stuffed animals that are remarkably lifelike.

These battery-powered models move gently every few seconds or

so—giving a little tail wag or head tilt. There's even a setting that simulates a cat's purr with a pleasing vibration the patient can feel. The dog makes soft puppy sounds—often eliciting a tender response from patients who have stopped communicating

According to a study by the *Journal of Gerontological Nursing*, patients with dementia who had mechanical cats experienced “less agitated behavior, better quality of life, increased interaction, communication, stimulation, relaxation and peace.”

These furry friends have changed lives, comforting our dementia patients and also family members who rejoice in the happiness they bring.



Buddy Stapp's wife says his communications skills have improved since he got his mechanical pup.

For more information, contact Dr. Gillian Hamilton, who oversees Hospice of the Valley's dementia program, (602) 530-6900.

A not-for-profit organization

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