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Hospice of The Gorge Encourages Nursing Students

June 5, 2007 - Hood River, Ore. - Hospice of The Gorge helps the local community college by welcoming its nursing students for educational “shadow” experiences and preceptorships (similar to an internship). Among this year’s graduating class are a number of students who worked alongside Hospice staff, including second-year student Kasey Schneider.

Columbia Gorge Community College is known throughout the region for its rigorous nursing program, not an easy thing in a rural area. To make the program competitive with urban teaching hospitals, CGCC utilizes a Rural Clinical Simulation Center, which houses two computer-programmed simulation “patients” that can be examined for vital signs and treated for symptoms. CGCC supplements this simulated training experience by teaming up with area health care providers to offer the Alternative Clinic Experience (ACE), a full-day visit to a local clinic or other setting. One of the most popular choices among the students is to “shadow” the nurses of Hospice of The Gorge.

“One of the best things about the ACE shadows is that [the students] can see how hospice staff work as a team,” says CGCC second-year nursing faculty Lorie Saito, R.N., M.S.N. “They see how hospice care can bring dignity and grace to a death.” All of the program’s 18 nursing students were able to visit Hospice of The Gorge as one of their ACEs this year.

Kasey Schneider was one of them. “I’ve always thought that hospice was something I’ve wanted to do,” she says. “I thought that my hospice ACE would be a make-or-break experience.” Schneider grew up in Goldendale, Washington, and now lives in Oregon’s Sherman County, where her husband is a deputy sheriff.

On a Tuesday in late February, Schneider arrived at the Hospice of The Gorge The Dalles office to attend a “team conference,” which is a meeting of every discipline involved in hospice care—from doctors and nurses to chaplains to social workers—to discuss the needs and changing conditions of the agency’s hospice patients.

“I like the positive atmosphere that the group had,” Schneider says. After the team conference and a potluck lunch (a monthly tradition in The Dalles office), Schneider accompanied Colleen Ballinger, R.N., on her visit to patient Mary Smith in The Dalles. Ballinger’s visit began and ended with a hug; in between, she monitored Smith’s vital signs and addressed any new or significant issues, on this day a sore spot on Smith’s foot.

With graduation from CGCC just days away, Schneider says that she already has a job lined up at the Klickitat Valley Hospital in Goldendale, where she will acquire “general experience”—but that her ultimate goal is to become a hospice nurse.

“I think that’s my calling,” Schneider says, “but we’ll see.”

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Hospice of The Gorge is a nonprofit, Medicare-certified public-benefit agency that since 1981 has provided comprehensive and compassionate care to those who face life-limiting illness and to their families. From offices in Hood River and The Dalles, Hospice of The Gorge serves seven counties: Skamania and Klickitat in Washington, and Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam and Morrow in Oregon. Hospice of The Gorge receives support from the United Way. Please visit the website for more information: www.hospiceofthegorge.org.

Photo captions:

File smith: Hospice of The Gorge nurse Colleen Ballinger examines The Dalles resident Mary Smith as student Kasey Schneider observes

File smith2: CGCC student Kasey Schneider observes as Hospice of The Gorge nurse Colleen Ballinger and The Dalles resident Mary Smith discuss treatment plan

File teamconference: Hospice of The Gorge team conference involves staff from all disciplines

File teamconf2: CGCC student Kasey Schneider (second from right) attends Hospice of The Gorge team conference