

JN



‘No Jew Is Ever Alone’

*Jewish Hospice &
Chaplaincy Network
marks first decade.*

Inside:

- **World Of Hospice – No Jew Is Ever Alone**
- **Soldiers Against Pain**
- **Voices: Hospice and Humility**

No Jew Is Ever Alone

Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network marks first decade

JN



PHOTO BY GLENN TRIEST

Hospice patient care coordinator Nathan Shiovitz, right, helped Jennifer Holtzman and her dad, Lou, reconcile in time to enjoy each other before his death in 2008.

Judith Doner Berne

Special to the Jewish News

"I didn't know hospice was for Jews."

That's the impression that Cheryl Weiss of West Bloomfield had 12 years ago as she tried to manage the care of her dying husband, active 8-year-old twins and a full-time teaching job with the Detroit Public Schools.

Even when a sister-in-law told her otherwise, she resisted because "it felt like I was saying I was giving up." It was her husband who said: "Anything that will make it easier for you."

"So many burdens," she says, "were taken off my shoulder" by Rabbi E.B. "Bunny" Freedman and social worker Barb Haddad — two of the people she now works with at Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network (JHCN).

"I know that my husband lived longer because hospice was there," Weiss says.

He had talked of suicide, but it never came up again during his 13 months at home with hospice care.

And though at one time she was afraid to

have him die at home, she says, "now I have so much peace with that. When I'm in the room that he died in, I sense his presence there."

"Dying is hard," says Freedman, JHCN executive director. "Dying with dignity, respect and comfort is even harder when people make bad decisions. JHCN is working its hardest to help people made good decisions."

That's evident at the weekly patient meeting of those at the heart of the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network. Each patient who has died that week is remembered, whether they entered hospice during the last hours of their lives or had been in the program for weeks or months. And everyone is made aware of new patients as well as those who are in palliative (comfort) care.

Tenth Anniversary

The rabbis, social workers and coordinators sitting around the table are getting ready to mark the organization's 10th anniversary by continuing to fulfill their founding promise: "No Jew Is Ever Alone."

At the same time, they aren't out to inter-

fere with any family or to duplicate services provided by other Jewish agencies or existing hospice programs.

"The best work that we do is connecting a family with its rabbi," Freedman says. "We don't need to be each family's spiritual caregiver. We're there when we're needed. We step back when we're not." Care statistics speak for themselves. In its first full year of existence, JHCN assisted 120 hospice and palliative care patients; last year that number was 530. The average daily patient census rose from 27 to 143 over the same period.



Haddad and Freedman worked together from the beginning. "That was when Bunny's office was his briefcase in his car," Haddad recalls.

David Techner
Hospice Chair



Orna Moreton, who eventually died from multiple sclerosis, had said that she found new meaning in life through weekly visits from Rabbi Hershel Klainberg and others of the Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network.

Now they occupy six rooms on the second floor of the Jewish Family Service (JFS) building in West Bloomfield, with access to additional space.

Southfield-based Ira Kaufman Chapel funeral director David Techner estimates that Jewish Hospice is now involved with 55-60 percent of Jews who die in Metro Detroit, working with 15 different clinically based hospices. At the same time, 135 volunteers have been trained by JHCN over the years.

"Hospice wasn't comfortable for anybody when we started 10 years ago," says Techner, president and chairman of the board of JHCN since Day One. "We had to convince people it's OK to have hospice. We had to make them understand that the medical community focuses on cure; hospice focuses on comfort. It's not about death; it's about end of life.

"People now pick up the phone and call hospice," he says. "I think it's exceeded our expectations. It's very diverse; we have everybody on board."

On Call 24-7

Along with Freedman, it's Nathan Shiovitz who makes sure that at the end of life, someone from Jewish Hospice is there for any patient and his or her family who wants the assistance. Five rabbis, representing Orthodox,

Conservative and Reform Jewry, are on staff to respond as well as other staff members and volunteers.

"Jewish Hospice is not a place — it's wherever you are," says Shiovitz, who is JHCN's patient coordinator. "That could be at home, in the hospital, in a nursing home ... most people are not in hospice facilities.

"I'm on call 24-7, especially on holidays," says Shiovitz, who was house-bound himself for many years and uses two canes to propel his lean frame from bedside to bedside.

He guides the admission process when JHCN refers a patient to hospice or when a new patient is referred by an area hospital, hospice organization or nursing home, virtually all of which call in JHCN for their Jewish patients.

"It's a very intense period — both for the patient and family," he says. "They hear hospice and they hear 'death.'"

A doctor must certify that life expectancy is six months for insurance to pay for hospice medical care. A medical hospice must provide spiritual care to meet insurance requirements. JHCN doesn't charge for its part in the process.

Hospice may be appropriate when you have a disease that isn't curable, you choose not to take the cure or you are in the final stages of dying, Shiovitz says. "Some patients surprise you and last longer or get better."

Over the years, he has helped bring an estranged daughter to her father's bedside; facilitated the wish of a young cancer-stricken volunteer firefighter to have firefighters participate in his funeral; and moved a woman suffering from untreated advanced breast cancer from deplorable conditions on Detroit's Cass Corridor to nursing home care until she died.

"I'm seeing so many who are alone, whose children live across the country and just can't pick up and be there," Shiovitz says. "It's always such an honor to be with a patient who has nobody else."

Bedside Stories

Stories of how JHCN helps are many. Here are a few:

- After Nancy Nida's dad, Harry Paull, received his terminal diagnosis, the family turned to St. John Hospice for clinical care headed by clinical nursing supervisor Rose Fenster and JHCN for spiritual sustenance.

"Rabbi Klainberg would daven with him and Nathan [Shiovitz] came to talk with him at the Heritage in Southfield," says Nida, who lives in Bloomfield Hills.

Her father's six-months-to-live diagnosis turned into four years. He died in 2007 at age 94. "All the stimulation and conversation and having this parade of people kept him alive," she says.

"We got the support, companionship and comfort from all of them," Nida says. "It was wonderful. They're a special group."

- Edith Polk also developed a special bond with JHCN chaplain Rabbi Hershel Klainberg during her 17 years in Hospice of Michigan's residential facility (which has since closed), says her son Richard Polk, an attorney from Huntington Woods.

His mother, who died in 2002 at age 84, had a degenerative neurological condition, but never lost her ability to communicate. "She was not a religious person at all," Polk said, but she developed this wonderful relationship with Rabbi Klainberg, who is Orthodox, that began when they first met.

When she explained that she wasn't observant, he said: "I promise not to try and convert you," Polk recalls. Her response: "What makes you think I won't try and convert you?"

She ended up asking him to officiate at her funeral. "One of the things that's overlooked," Polk says, "is how much help hospice provides not just to the patient but to the family."



JHCN Executive Director Rabbi Bunny Freedman, standing, along with Rabbis Jennifer Kaluzny, Hershel Klainberg, Avie Shapiro, A. Irving Schnipper and David Nelson (not pictured), ensure that all Jews in need can have a bedside chaplain.

Holocaust Survivor

Hela Jutkiewicz, who recently turned 90, is one of Klainberg's newest charges after falling in her Oak Park home, where she lives alone.

The bright-eyed, animated woman talks freely of her worries and of her Holocaust experience from her room at Danto Health Care Center in West Bloomfield, where she is receiving physical therapy.

She wonders how she'll manage when she returns home. "I don't know how it will be," she says. "I try until now [to do] everything myself. I hope the Jewish community will help."

"Because you are a Holocaust survivor, Klainberg says, speaking with her in both Yiddish and English, "the Jewish community has a special responsibility to you."

She qualifies, he says, for help meeting her emotional, spiritual and everyday needs under the palliative care program.

This is probably where social worker Haddad, who works both for JFS and Jewish Hospice in a program known as Lifelinks, will enter the picture. "I have a whole lot of different resources," she says, whether patients and/or families need caregivers, medical interventions or help in making decisions. "I try not to give any advice. It's more 'What do you feel comfortable doing?'"

She does tell them, "Whatever you do, wherever you go, we will follow you. We will try and advocate for you."

"It's not just about a friendly rabbi being there and saying a prayer," Freedman says. "We

know the vast array of services in the Jewish community."

West Bloomfield-based Temple Israel Rabbi Jennifer Kaluzny began working with Jewish Hospice eight years ago as an intern when she was still a rabbinical student. "I wanted to learn from Bunny," she says. "I've been there ever since. He has created an organization absolutely vital to this community."

Being a woman and a Reform rabbi allows her to help a particular segment of the Jewish population, she says. "There are plenty of women who, for one reason or another, aren't connected to Judaism or don't have a relationship with a rabbi. They see me as a very non-threatening entree into Judaism."

One Of A Kind

Metro Detroit's Jewish hospice and palliative care program appears to be unique.

"I call Rabbi Bunny or Nathan when I have a Jewish patient," says Dr. Kathleen Murphy, a geriatric specialist who is medical director of the Detroit-based Hospices of Henry Ford Health Systems nursing home team and a palliative care consultant at William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak.

"I make the call myself," Murphy says. "It is too important to delegate to another clerk or hospital staff member. Many patients say they are not religious, not observant, not interested or 'just fine.' But when I tell them that it is more about support, validation, kindness and simple allegiances, they usually welcome the referral.

"I am not Jewish," Murphy says. "Yes,



Rabbi Hershel Klainberg is often the go-to chaplain when it comes to comforting Holocaust survivors like palliative care patient Hela Jutkiewicz, 90, of Oak Park.

there are other robust and rich religious and cultural communities in this area. I know of not one, though, that has this kind of outreach and service. It is immediately personal."

David Nussbaum isn't sure if Metro Detroit really knows and appreciates what it has in the JHCN program he aspires to emulate in New York City. He heads the nonprofit Metro Jewish Health System there that administers to 1,700 hospice and 2,000 palliative care patients annually.

"We can't hope to offer the depth of support that I've seen Bunny's team provide," says Nussbaum, who once headed Jewish Federation of Flint. "What he's done with his team has shown us what is possible. The unusual thing about it is that it's religiously, spiritually and ethnically based instead of service-based.

"Detroit has a definable Jewish community that is one of the best organized and executed in the country," Nussbaum says. When you combine that with "Bunny's rainmaker abilities to create relationships with a variety of institutions, you have an amazing resource."

For more information on the Jewish Hospice & Chaplaincy Network, call (248) 592-2687 or visit www.jewishhospice.org. ■



"Whether you are old or young, everyone needs to be touched," says hospice patient care coordinator Nathan Shiovitz, who comforts Sheila McClung, who has since died.