



Sentara RMH Hospice

Placement Description

- Support for terminally ill and their families
- Grief and loss issues.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Assist in organization and implementation of projects, conferences, groups, volunteer training
- Attend team meetings, volunteer support meetings, volunteer training, staff inservices
- Research projects (potential)
- Direct patient and family contact (after complete training)
- Attend grief support group and assist with phone calls to bereaved family members
- Office duties

Other Notes

Good to do training the semester before placement

Contact Information

- Contact Person: Peggy Brubaker (Volunteer Coordinator)
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Read about students' experiences at this site below:



Fall 2016 - Halley Barton

RMH Sentara Hospice is a facility that provides comfort care to those with terminal illnesses with a prognosis of 6 months or less. Sentara Hospice's mission is to become the leading provider of end-of-life care in Virginia. However, the mission of all Hospice care is to provide holistic care to improve the quality of life for the patient. To accomplish this goal, RMH Hospice employs doctors, nurses, health aides, social workers, volunteer coordinators, bereavement coordinators and also uses the unique capabilities of volunteers.

While interning at RMH Hospice, I was able to learn through observation and application. I shadowed different employees on their visits to patients and got a better understanding of their positions and roles within Hospice care. While shadowing them, for the most part I listened, but also got to talk with the patients and families. Another role that I played was as a volunteer. Each patient is given the opportunity to have a volunteer for up to 3 hours per week. Some patients wanted companionship and talk, while other patient's caregivers needed a few hours of respite so that they could run errands. During these volunteer hours, I was able to develop relationships with the patients and caregivers and help with their care. I also was given the opportunity to attend the interdisciplinary team meetings once a week. While these meetings could occasionally run long, they were incredibly interesting because almost all employees attended it and would all figure out how to provide the best care for their patients that they could. Another opportunity that I was given was to attend the bereavement support group while both participating and observing.

A huge advantage of RMH Hospice was that it's very close to campus and was only a five-minute drive from my apartment. Everyone on the staff was very friendly and provided great information to help facilitate my education while working there. Most of the employees were happy to have me join them on their patient visits and to answer my questions. Another very helpful thing about this site is that my supervisor, the volunteer coordinator, was always looking for patients who may challenge or interest me. I was given quite a few patients who were nonverbal, or had a language barrier, or had interesting psychological application. I really appreciated that every new patient was a learning opportunity and I ended up at the library doing research to help my patients as best as possible multiple times. One disadvantage of this site is the need to drive to patients' homes, so it would be very difficult to work here and not have a car, or not have money available to pay for gas.

A unique difficulty that everyone in this position must face is that the patients are near the end of their life. I actually was with a patient right before she passed away and it isn't quite like how they portray it in the movies; it takes some time for someone to pass away. There is a period that is called actively dying that could be disturbing to some. A patient's breathing can stop for about 30 seconds before resuming again. I think that it's important to understand this aspect of dying before going into this field placement and know that being present during the end of someone's life can be very difficult for some. It is also such a rewarding and unique opportunity to help out a person and their family during this difficult stage as well. Before going into this placement, though, I would urge you to think more about death and really contemplate if



this is something that you want to expose yourself to during the next semester. RMH Hospice does provide great care for its volunteers if they were with a patient at a difficult time, and almost all employees are open to talking to you about the difficulties of this job as well. I was actually surprised at how rare it was for me to leave the site leaving upset, so don't discount working here because of the difficulties you may face during it. However, I want you to have an accurate perception of what Hospice care entails.

While working here, I learned a lot about the health care system and the advantages and disadvantages that it has. One issue with a lot of Hospice care systems is that doctors tend to send patients to Hospice care very late. This can really damage how much we can improve a patient's quality of life, and also how well the patient and families are dealing with the prognosis. A patient is not normally given holistic care until they enter Hospice, and it's truly amazing how much it can help with a patient's psychological well-being. Being able to see this first hand really showed me that I want to change the way that our society views death and dying. Rather than avoiding the topic, I would like to see people have conversations about how they want to die with their health care providers, and their providers be able to explain the options to the patients so that they can make an informed decision for their care. I would also like to see more families talk about what they want, so that when the inevitable happens, the patient (no matter their mental and physical capabilities) can pass in the way that they would like. Changing a society's view on death will take quite a long time, and a lot of work, but I would like to try to be a part of the process.

One other piece that surprised me was the health care system as a whole. While the people I worked with were all warm and caring, there is a colder side that comes from upper management. Health care companies are still companies, and some of the rules about who is applicable for Hospice and who is not can seem a little cold, but it is still necessary to provide these guidelines. While, overall I loved my internship, this was one piece that I had not been expecting (perhaps because I can be a bit naïve about business in general) but I think it's something important to understand going into the internship as well.