



# Community Matters!



## Eastern Maine HomeCare

EMHS MEMBER



## Provides a caring touch to hospice patients



*Kathy Murray, RN, Eastern Maine Homecare massage therapist.*

On a daily basis, patients in Eastern Maine HomeCare's (EMHC) hospice programs may experience pain, discomfort, and emotional distress from debilitating diagnoses, such as cancer, heart/respiratory disease, Alzheimer's/dementia, ALS and other terminal illnesses. It's the goal of hospice massage therapists, like Kathy Murray, RN, to help these patients live more fully and comfortably. This means a focus on palliative care by providing for the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the patients.

When patients are admitted to the program they must have a referral from a medical professional stating that their disease is likely to be terminal within six months. It is a challenging time that can be filled with turmoil and pain. As health problems arise, the hospice team works with the patient, family members, and other healthcare providers to address pain and anxiety so that the patient can focus attention on the bigger issues around closure and acceptance.

Pain and anxiety are often major problems and as the disease progresses immobility contributes to an increase in both. "Our goal of the hospice team is to help patients manage their symptoms while staying as alert as possible," explains Kathy. "Medication can be very effective, but often comes with the unwanted side effects such as confusion, drowsiness, and constipation. We use massage therapy as one treatment for hospice patients to not only ease anxiety, but to decrease symptoms such as nausea and pain."



While Medicare does cover hospice-related services such as medical care (doctors, nurses, physical and occupational therapy, social work services), as well as medications and equipment needs, massage therapy is not yet covered. Thanks to donor and grant funds, EMHC is able to continue to offer massage therapy to terminally ill patients.

Kathy commented, "It's truly a gift to work with these patients at the end of their lives. We have seen positive results from patients who have benefited from massage therapy. I feel fortunate to be able to help through this skill and make their remaining days more comfortable."

TOGETHER We're Stronger