

Northwest Wisconsin HomeCare Recognizes Hospice Month

November is the time of the year that the country recognizes the real everyday heroes of home care and hospice — the nurses, the therapists, the social workers, the chaplains, home health aides, the personal and supportive care workers — the individuals who work tirelessly to provide professional health and palliative care and support to so many individuals in need of quality health services. While hospice is a centuries old concept, the hospice movement in America did not begin until the late 1960s. Home healthcare, which dates back to the late 1880s, has evolved into a high-quality, cost-effective service.

"Our home care professionals, along with advances in medicine, make it possible for people to stay in their homes and receive the care they need," said Pat Pope, administrator of NWHC. "In particular, our hospice care allows terminally ill patients and their families to experience the end of life together with comfort, compassion and dignity in the place they call home," she added.

Currently NWHC serves all or parts of 12 counties in western Wisconsin out of the central office along with branches located in Bloomer, Cameron, Menomonie, and Mondovi.

Respiratory Therapist Becomes Certified

A Luther Midelfort employee recently decided to take her credibility to a new level. Mary Ann Erbs, lead respiratory therapist, recently took the test to earn her credentials as a certified pulmonary functions technologist; she is the first employee at the hospital to do so.

"(The certification) gives more creditability to your expertise," she says. To properly diagnose patients, Mary Ann stresses the importance of upholding the standards of the American Thoracic Society (ATS), which sets the acceptability criteria for tests done in a pulmonary function lab.

Thirty respiratory therapists are in the department, but only about six people do pulmonary function tests, Mary Ann says. The department does about 80 to 100 pulmonary function tests each month.



Mary Ann Erbs is the organization's first certified pulmonary functions technologist.

While taking the test didn't send any new material her way, Mary Ann says it caused her to brush up on a few skills she hadn't been using. The test covers not only pulmonary function tests and testing equipment but also blood gases and blood gas analyzers as well as cardiopulmonary exercise/stress testing and metabolic function testing. Some of these are no longer done by the

Respiratory Care Department at Luther Midelfort. However, "If you don't use it, you lose it," Mary Ann says.

Passing the test not only improved her professional credibility, but made Mary Ann more confident in her ability to do her job. "It gave me a greater sense I can teach (others)," Mary Ann says. "My job is to get the very best effort out of patients and to have efforts meet ATS criteria. It is also my responsibility to monitor tests done by other therapists who rotate through the PF lab and to ensure that they are aware of the current standards and that they are doing their best to have patients meet them. If they have difficulty meeting standards, I will work with them to find out where there might be a problem. A diagnosis is often made based on results of the tests we do, and it is important that the results we send to the physician are accurate."

Great job, Mary Ann!