

Natasha Doughty

Initially my expectations for the Stein Hospice clinical were uncomfortable and unpleasant at best. Although my mom was a hospice nurse for many years, she didn't often talk about the positives of her job, or why (and if) she was happy. I was very involved with my great-grandmother's care in the months preceding her death, and the memories from that are mostly negative. Even after Stein was involved in her care, her behavior and mentation were frightening, even as an adult caring for her. My grandma hallucinated, thrashed in bed, and had moments where she cried or screamed, there were countless times she became physically combative while we attended to her needs. During my time as an aide, I have also witnessed numerous deaths, with the majority being unpleasant. I can recall codes when I felt like I was doing more harm than good, patients struggling to breathe, sounding and looking as if they were suffocating before ultimately succumbing to Covid, and complicated family dynamics surrounding a loved one's sudden decline and imminent death. In my experience, peaceful deaths are extremely few and far between, so I was expecting this clinical to be primarily negative.

Thankfully, my pessimistic outlook was not the overall experience that I had while at Stein. The entire environment fostered peace, and was supportive of not only the patient, but the family. The lighting was low, visitation was encouraged and made easier with comfortable furniture that was reminiscent of home, and refreshments were always available for the family. Each patient struggled with being uncomfortable at times, but their needs were met quickly and efficiently by the nurses and physician. I was extremely impressed with how quickly everyone worked, while still maintaining a calm environment. There were several patients that I cared for at the hospital before their transfer to Stein. Each patient seemed much more comfortable and at peace while at Stein compared to the hospital.

One of the patients at Stein had been a Telesitter patient at Firelands prior to their transfer. They were at the hospital for several weeks, moving from medical units to the rehab unit, where they stayed for at least three weeks. I worked as a Telesitter two weekends in a row and was surprised to see how much the patient had declined since the week I saw them last. They were originally admitted to Telesitter for a risk of falls due to dementia, however the second week they seemed delirious, and their mentation had declined rapidly. The following weekend I worked they had been discharged, and they were at Stein when I arrived for my clinical two days later. Physically they were declining, their respirations became very apneic, with use of accessory muscles, and they had a buildup of secretions due to their inability to swallow or clear their throat. At one point, the lorazepam was doing very little, and the patient was reaching out and appeared distressed. This was very unsettling for their significant other, so the nurse offered the family a break while we performed a bath and dressing change. The patient was upset while we attempted to bathe them, moaning out and attempting to grab us. We started to play classic rock, the patients' favorite, and they settled down, at one point, their toes tapped, and the patient smiled. The song changed to a 90s alternative song at which point the patient became more agitated because it wasn't their preference. The nurse and I sang the song to the patient, as it was one of our favorites, and he calmed back down. We completed the tasks, changed the patient into a fresh shirt brought from home, and

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welcomed the family back in. The wife commented on how nice he looked in fresh clothes and that he appeared more restful.

My experience at Stein was incredibly positive and moving. Although sadness was present, each life was celebrated and respected in a way that fostered peace for the patient and their family. There are still moments of discomfort or fear for the patients, but their needs are attended to in a way that far surpasses what I have seen at the hospital. In no way do I fault the nurses or physicians in the hospital setting, but it was incredibly evident that the hospice environment is explicitly designed for the comfort of those transitioning. Although all patient care is meaningful, everything at Stein seemed extra important, as you were possibly helping someone with a task for the last time. We completed postmortem care on a patient, which felt almost holy and sacred, as we were preparing for a visit by their family to say goodbye. I know from personal experience that funerals are often a blur of moments and faces, but having the opportunity to say goodbye in a more intimate setting is a gift. I am very grateful for the experience and have seriously contemplated becoming an inpatient hospice nurse after graduation based on my time at Stein.