

Vanderbilt man honored as a Hospice Caregiver of the Year

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BY SONIA WHALEN MILLER | Thursday, Dec. 1, 2011

John Robinson of Vanderbilt has been recognized as Hospice Caregiver of the Year for the Northeast region, by Amedisys, one of the largest home health and hospice care providers in the country.

Robinson, a hospice nurse for 11 years, works for Amedisys Hospice of Pennsylvania in Monongahela and recently visited his employer's main headquarters in Louisiana for the award ceremony.

"I was visiting a patient one afternoon, and I received a phone call from the company's medical director in Baton Rouge," Robinson said.

That's when he was informed he had been nominated and chosen for the award. "I was told that I was picked for the Spirit of Excellence Award for the outstanding care I provide to my patients and families both within Amedisys and also outside," Robinson said.

Being recognized among the 17,000 employees of Amedisys, was humbling, said Robinson, aware that it was his fellow co-workers who selected him for the prestigious award.

"To be nominated by your peers is a true honor. I work with an awesome bunch of professionals. We are more like a family than co-workers and for them to nominate me, gives me a sense of pride," Robinson said.

Vickie Carolla, hospice director of operations in the Monongahela Amedisys Care Center, is one of the individuals responsible for recommending Robinson to the company's award committee. She said Robinson's work as a wish coordinator with UNITY a Journey of Hope, a nonprofit organization which grants wishes to adults with life-limiting illnesses, also warranted him to be honored.

"John is a dedicated hospice nurse, very kind and compassionate with his patients and their family, and always looking for that need for 'closure' at the end of life with a wish that may be granted. He has also been very supportive at helping out at our volunteer and bereavement events," Carolla said.

"All of John's co-workers at the Monongahela care center were also honored and excited to have him receive this award. Everyone at the branch supports Unity and their efforts and is always asking for updates on the wishes being granted," added Carolla.

Robinson, who studied at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, Mass., said he is passionate to start each day of work, interacting with patients and families alike. From assessing patient needs -- whether it is physical, emotional or spiritual -- many of his visits involve reminiscing with patients about their lives, and building a special kind of trust and respect.

Robinson said it was his mother-in-law that took the time to teach him about "comfort angels," helping him understand the process of dying -- from awake and alert to the end of life event, prior to passing 14 days after she was diagnosed with lung cancer.

Robinson has drawn from those personal experiences and finished a book he said he hopes to one day publish. Calling it a caregiver's guide, he said the book describes the end of life process from both the patient and caregiver's perspective.

"(It) Gives tips on how to care for you, the caregiver. Most importantly it says what the patient would say if unable to. 'I love you for being you and caring for me.' It is emotional but needs read because it takes away the stigmas associated with death and dying," said Robinson.

Changing the focus to a positive one, giving hope where it might seem lost and going the extra mile to make a difference beyond the hospice nursing job is Robinson's goal every day.

"I would recommend this field to anyone who has a sincere compassion, caring, in their heart," he said.