The Ken Hamilton Caregivers Center
Caring for the Family Caregiver

At Northern Westchester Hospital (NWH), commitment to patient and family centered care is central to our mission and is at the forefront of every decision. The Ken Hamilton Caregivers Center (KHCC), now in its 10th year, is dedicated to the support and well-being of the family caregiver, caring for a loved one with a serious illness. The KHCC provides a place of respite within the hospital for family caregivers to relax and recharge. Volunteer coaches and a licensed social worker help family caregivers effectively manage the stress associated with caring for a loved one through supportive counseling, assistance with navigating the health system and access to community resources. All services are offered free of charge.

Background:
• First in hospital facility of its kind in the New York Metropolitan area.
• Named in memory of a community member who was cared for by his wife, Marian, during his battle with lung cancer.
• After Ken’s death in 2004, Marian was inspired by her experience, realizing that hospitals are often not equipped to help the caregivers in a meaningful way.
• Marian approached NWH because her vision dovetailed with NWH’s patient-centered and family centered philosophy.

Program:
• A relaxing oasis where family caregivers can take a break and unwind in a private quiet place, while still being close to their loved one.
• Acts as a wellness and resource center, and serves as a private sanctuary during the very demanding and stressful times of providing care for a loved one.
• Services include: coaching and counseling; a monthly support group; resource library, with caregiving, educational and spiritual materials; a massage chair, computer and internet access; telephones; fax machine; a kitchenette with healthy snacks; and, most importantly, a peaceful area for reflection, reading and rest.
• Services are provided free of charge to all family and professional caregivers in the hospital and community.

Location:
• The Center is located in the main lobby of NWH and is available to caregivers 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week.
• The Center is open from 9 AM to 9 PM, after which caregivers can access the Center through the nursing supervisor or security.

Issue:
• A third of family caregivers report difficulties in finding personal time and managing emotional and physical stress.
• More than half of family caregivers report that their health got worse while taking care of loved ones.
• Two-thirds put off seeing a doctor because of their caregiver responsibilities.
• More than half say they’re looking for guidance in caring for the patient and in caring for themselves.

A Patient-Centered Approach:
• Caregivers’ Focus Groups identified what was most important to them: such as non-judgmental, emotional support, guidance through the hospital system, and referrals to community services. Caregivers described a physical space as an oasis of rest and relief for caregivers.
• Staff Focus groups wanted a warm, comfortable place for families to feel safe having planning of care meetings, end of life discussions, discharge planning, advance directives, caregiver support groups, resource referrals and a place to get away from the dynamic, stressful clinical areas.

Staffing:
• Due to generous philanthropic support, the Center is staffed by a full-time social worker Monday-Friday, a part-time replication coordinator and 34 volunteer coaches.

Key Learnings:
• Start small with a committed team of admins, social workers, nurses and volunteers, forging a partnership with the community.
• The Support Program is the Centerpiece and can happen in the Clinical Areas or in any place where a private conversation can take place. You don’t need a physical Center to get started!
• Give ample time to select, train and debrief coaches.
• Don’t forget to think about staff caregiving needs and include them in the support.
• This Program resonates with the community and fundraising works.

Results:
• The KHCC staff has grown from three to 34 trained volunteer coaches.
• The number of people served has risen exponentially: from 500 family interactions in 2006 to over 52,000, with 6300, annually.
• The Center is fully funded by the Community.

Awards:
• Best Practice Program from the Caregivers Action Network.
• Quality of Life Award from the United Way.
• Best Program for Replication.
• Best Practice for Family, Friends and Social Support.

“Your quiet rooms were so peaceful and helped us take some time out for ourselves. The staff of coaches is so caring, loving, helpful, wonderful and understanding that it made it easier for us to get through this terrible time in our lives.”
— Linda, Caregiver

“We are thrilled that we had the opportunity to participate in The KHCC Replication Program — seeing the program first hand was invaluable. All the materials, lessons learned and the opportunity to collaborate with other Centers has helped us to get started and bring a Caregivers Center to our community. We now say ‘what did we do when we didn’t have a Caregivers Center!”
— Replicating Institution

“Until you’ve been through it, you don’t know what it’s like.”
— Marian Hamilton, founder of The Caregivers Center

Replicating Institutions:
Danbury Hospital, Connecticut
Englewood Hospital, New Jersey
Hospital of Pennsylvania — UPENN
Mercy Medical Center, Iowa
Midland Hospital, Michigan
Montefiore Medical Center, New York (2 Centers)
Overlook Hospital, New Jersey
Shore Medical Center, New Jersey
Westchester Medical Center, New York
White Plains Hospital, New York

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