



For Immediate Release

Contact: Mary Ann Sabo
Sabo Public Relations, 616.485.1432
maryann@sabo-pr.com
or
Erin Nemastil
Sabo Public Relations, 616.633.0642
kristin@sabo-pr.com

Hospice of Michigan Expands Services to Hispanic Community

Grand Rapids, Michigan, July 29, 2014 – Hospice of Michigan is expanding services to the Hispanic community in Grand Rapids.

Michigan’s largest provider of hospice and palliative care services, Hospice of Michigan has established an office at 1530 Grandville Ave. SW that allows it to offer greater depth and breadth of programming to meet the needs of the surrounding community. The program was launched in 2013 with a generous grant from the Peter C. and Emajean Cook Foundation.

In the first year of this program, HOM has been able to:

- Hire a bilingual nurse and hospice aide
- Provide culturally sensitive hospice services and educational materials in Spanish to the greater Grand Rapids area
- Connect with healthcare, social service and religious organizations, such as Clinica Santa Maria, Roosevelt Park Ministries, Grandville Avenue Academy of the Arts, United Church Outreach Ministries or UCOM, Cook Library, Roosevelt Park Neighborhood Association and others
- Partner with the nursing program at Calvin College to provide free blood pressure and blood sugar screens at UCOM and Baxter Neighborhood Association
- Educate the community on the role of hospice and palliative care services at the end of life
- Offer free English as a second language courses at its office on Grandville Avenue

Judy Ponstine is just wrapping up her first year as HOM’s community outreach liaison and registered nurse within the Hispanic community. She has been joined by Jary Lizardo, another RN who is also bilingual and will split his time between HOM’s Hispanic outreach program and its general patient population. They are being supported by Mayra Montero, who is also bilingual and has joined HOM as a hospice aide.

“The goal of our program is to ensure that hospice services are available in Spanish and in a culturally sensitive manner,” said Ponstine, who brings more than 30 years of public health and community engagement experience to HOM. “Our vision is to put a sustainable program in place that will establish a Spanish-speaking team of a nurse, social worker, spiritual care advisor and home health aides.

“We’re delighted to welcome Jary back to Grand Rapids and are excited to have him at HOM. As a native speaker of Spanish, he brings tremendous cultural sensitivity, compassion and understanding to his new role and will be a true asset to all of our patients.

Ponstine joined the organization in April 2013 and explained that the last year has been one of establishing foundations and connections within the Hispanic community. Well-known already as a nurse and teacher, she has focused her efforts on building trust and sharing her healthcare knowledge with the surrounding community.

Ponstine explained her team faces challenges within the Hispanic community when it comes to the acceptance of hospice and palliative care, including:

- A family-centered culture that discourages outsiders from coming into a home while encouraging the Hispanic community to take “take care of its own”
- Fear over immigration status, which can prevent a family from seeking hospice or palliative services even when the need may be extreme
- Lack of exposure to the concept of end-of-life care, including pain management, the dying process and related issues

“We are trying to put a different face on hospice care in the Hispanic community,” Ponstine explained. “Hospice of Michigan provides quality of life at the end of life, allowing our patients and their families to focus on living, not just dying. Through our community outreach work in the Grandville Avenue neighborhood, we have started to establish the relationships and build the trust that will be crucial to our success.”

Lizardo will be key to that success, according to Ponstine. A native of Puerto Rico, **Lizardo** studied elementary education at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, then spent five years teaching in the Grand Rapids Public Schools System, including two years at Congress Elementary as a bilingual teacher.

He returned to Puerto Rico where he earned a bachelor of science in nursing at Antillean Adventist University in Mayaguez, graduating *magna cum laude*. He spent nearly a year working in a surgical intensive care unit for Bella Vista Hospital in Puerto Rico before returning to Grand Rapids. He now serves as a nursing case manager for HOM.

Montero brings nearly 15 years of aide experience in clinical and dietary settings to her new role with HOM. She will work with patients in the Hispanic outreach program, as well as in HOM’s general patient population, providing assistance with bathing, meals, medication and other support activities.

Prior to joining HOM, Montero worked as a nurse aide at Heartland Health Care in Grand Rapids for more than four years. She also spent nearly eight years as a dietary aide for Metron of Forest Hills.

About Hospice of Michigan

A nationally recognized leader in end-of-life care, Hospice of Michigan is the original – and largest – hospice in the state. The non-profit cares for more than 1,400 patients each day in 56 counties across Michigan, raising more than \$4 million each year to cover the cost of care for the uninsured and underinsured. HOM offers a broad range of services to enhance the quality of life at the end of life, including At Home Support™, our advanced illness management program, community-based palliative care and pediatric care programs. HOM provides grief support and counseling, caregiver education and support, and education programs for physicians and healthcare professionals through its research, training and education arm, the Hospice of Michigan Institute. For more information, call 888.247.5701 or visit www.hom.org.