



**For Immediate Release**

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## **Facing Death a Second Time: Hospice of Michigan Works to Understand End-of-Life Needs of Holocaust Survivors**

**Detroit, June 10, 2014** – During World War II, millions of European Jews faced unspeakable horrors and death at the hands of the Nazis in Auschwitz, Dachau, Buchenwald and other concentration camps.

Decades later, most of these Holocaust Survivors are in their 80s and 90s and find themselves facing death again, causing flashbacks and old feelings of panic and fear to rise to the surface. In an effort to provide better and more sensitive end-of-life care to the hundreds of Holocaust Survivors in the Detroit area, Hospice of Michigan is partnering with the Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network to help its staff gain a deeper understanding of the Holocaust and the unique end-of-life needs of survivors.

“My mother lived through things that most can’t begin to imagine,” said Eva Freed, daughter of Ilona Praeger, Holocaust survivor and HOM patient. “Her experiences during the war have affected her throughout her life, but even more so now that she’s reached end-of-life.

“My mother lost so many people whom she loved during the Holocaust – including her parents. In fact, her mother saved her from the concentration camps by pushing her out of line into a group of people so she could escape and hide with a friend – that was the last time she ever saw her mother.

“Now, at her end-of-life, my mother is experiencing extreme guilt that she was able to lead a long life when so many others died. She also has a real fear of authority which has become more prominent recently.”

Freed explains that it’s important for her mom’s hospice team to learn more about her Holocaust experience so they can better understand why she has such fear and anxiety.

“Some people might just think my mother is a difficult person, but if you take the time to understand what she’s been through you’d understand why she reacts to things the way she does,” Freed noted.

As one of the first steps in this learning process, HOM staff will tour the Holocaust Memorial Center in Farmington Hills with the staff of the JHCN on June 12, 16 and 19 from 10 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. Each morning will include a docent-led tour of the center, followed by questions and answers with a Holocaust survivor and a rabbi whose parents are survivors.

“Holocaust survivors lived in an inhumane world, being deprived of food, dignity and respect,” said Rabbi Bunny Freedman, director of Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network. “They lost everything but somehow managed to survive. Now they’ve been told they’re terminally ill and will face death once again.”

Currently, HOM knows some of the unique end-of-life issues Holocaust survivors have include:

- **Flashbacks:** At end-of-life, many survivors start reliving the panic and fear they experienced in the concentration camps. Even seeing people in uniform, such as doctors, nurses and paramedics, can trigger flashbacks of encounters with the Nazis. Many patients suffer from hallucinations making them believe they are back in the camps.

- Nutrition and hydration issues: When patients reach end-of-life, they often refuse food and water. Medical research has shown this is natural as their body begins the dying process, and forcing nutrition actually causes the patient more discomfort. While this can be hard for any family member to accept, it's especially difficult for the families of Holocaust survivors, whose loved ones were deprived of food and water in the concentration camps.
- Hiding pain: A survival mechanism for Holocaust survivors was burying their pain – a trait many have carried with them since the end of the war. But at end of life, in order for hospice to be effective, the patient's medical team needs to be aware of their discomfort.
- Survivor guilt: Holocaust survivors watched everyone around them die – their parents, spouses, children, friends and neighbors. Many feel strong guilt that they survived and even remorse for actions they took to save their life. Now, as they face death again, that guilt and remorse is coming to the surface.

“Our event with Hospice of Michigan will help participants better understand why survivors are the way they are,” Freedman added. “It's important that survivors receive tolerance, space, respect and dignity.”

HOM has a history of taking measures to better understand various constituencies. In the 1980s, HOM was the first hospice in Michigan to care for AIDS patients, and more recently the organization completed a robust training program and now holds the highest possible certification for working with the unique needs of veterans. Now, with nine Holocaust survivors currently in its care, HOM recognizes the traumatic events these individuals lived through and realizes it will need to develop a care plan tailored to them.

Freedman, whose organization works with hospice providers throughout the Metro Detroit area, estimated there are perhaps 1,000 Holocaust survivors living in the region.

“One of Hospice of Michigan's core values is the ability to acknowledge and embrace religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity,” said Robert Cahill, president and CEO of HOM. “This event is important because we recognize given their age, hundreds of survivors in the Detroit area will likely need hospice services over the next several years. Educating our staff on the background and unique needs of Holocaust survivors gives them the tools to better understand and serve these patients.”

### **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](http://www.hom.org).

### **About Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network**

Jewish Hospice and Chaplaincy Network partners with hospices, hospitals and health care agencies to provide patient advocacy and support services to meet the cultural and spiritual needs of Jewish patients and their families.

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