

St. Mary's

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the distinct style of their founders. Has the span of more than a century caused the open-handed, warm-hearted approach of St. Mary's founding sisters to be replaced by efficiency and technological competence?

Not at all, comes the response from a number of quarters. An administrator described the "family-like relations among staff. The nurses all know each other and help carry each other's burdens." The mother of a cancer patient wrote to thank the staff for their understanding, professional care and "personal touch." Another cited the "utmost courtesy" of the entire staff, from nurses to housekeepers.

The true story told by TV reporter David Burns may put these remarks into perspective. While doing a series on Rochester's homeless citizens for Channel 13 news, Burns and a photographer posed as street people to test the area's health-care services to the indigent. While his friend operated a camera disguised in a bedroll, Burns pretended to collapse late one afternoon at the Four Corners, downtown. An ambulance was called and paramedics, concerned that Burns' heart had stopped, suggested that he go to the hospital. The attendants took him to St. Mary's.

"I looked and acted like a real deadbeat," Burns recalled. "They knew I couldn't pay for my care because I said I hadn't eaten in a couple days and was looking for work. Nevertheless, everyone at St. Mary's went out of their way to treat me as a human being."

Burns went on to describe how the admitting staff member tried to calm Burns' crying, the doctor took care to introduce himself before beginning his examination, and nurses made sure the two "street people" had a meal before they left.

"By contrast," said Burns, "I can recall many situations when I didn't get that kind of treatment even as a paying patient. Some doctors and nurses treat health problems as medical conditions that involve human beings as an afterthought."

The personal, professional touch noted by

Burns and others is a deliberate style of health care based on three Christian truths, Sister Kinnarney explained. "First, human life is sacred no matter what stage or condition. The dignity and courtesy we accord patients and their families stem from this basic belief, as does our refusal to conduct an abortion or any research that would degrade the human person."

"Second, we believe that Christ loves the poor; it's evident in all the Gospels.

"Third, we believe that suffering and death have meaning," she continued. "That's why we provide pastoral care and support patients who remain at home. One woman who is terminally ill with cancer receives a weekly phone call from her surgeon. We go to wakes and funerals.

"These are small things, but they make us different from a hospital where people just go in and out," Sister Kinnarney added. "Health care is a sterile kind of thing when compas-

sion is lacking."

"It's important that patients feel cared about as well as cared for," said Pat Janus, a nurse who administers chemotherapy to cancer patients. "Our commitment goes beyond taking care of patients' bodily needs for eight hours."

The staff in the oncology (cancer) center have found many ways to improve the quality of life for their patients. Patients are supplied with small, brightly-colored pillows to take home, thanks to the cooperative efforts of staff, volunteers, and patient families. "Patients prop their arms on (the pillows) during IV treatment, and the newly diagnosed often hang onto them like teddy bears," said the nurse.

Nurses and doctors also go out of their way to make families feel a part of care giving by encouraging them to stay and providing soft drinks. "The women's board recently donated two recliners for family members who stay

overnight. These are much better than cots because patients can see their loved ones and hold their hands," Janus explained.

Sometimes, the nurse added, patients on her floor just need someone to listen. "Many people who are hospitalized for cancer are confronting their own mortality and re-evaluating their lives." She views the sister assigned to her department as "a cushion to fall back on. She knows all the patients and their families and makes herself available when someone is depressed or just needs to talk."

The sisters' presence and the opportunity to attend morning prayer at the hospital remind Pat Janus of the deeper dimension to her work. "Illness doesn't make disagreeable people more loveable," she said. "But you can see beyond a sick person's cantankerousness and hostility if you remind yourself, 'This is part of the Body of Christ.'"



Michael Necdet Aydogan

Nurse Pat Janus takes the time to chat with a patient in St. Mary's oncology unit.

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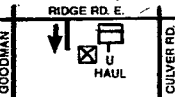


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