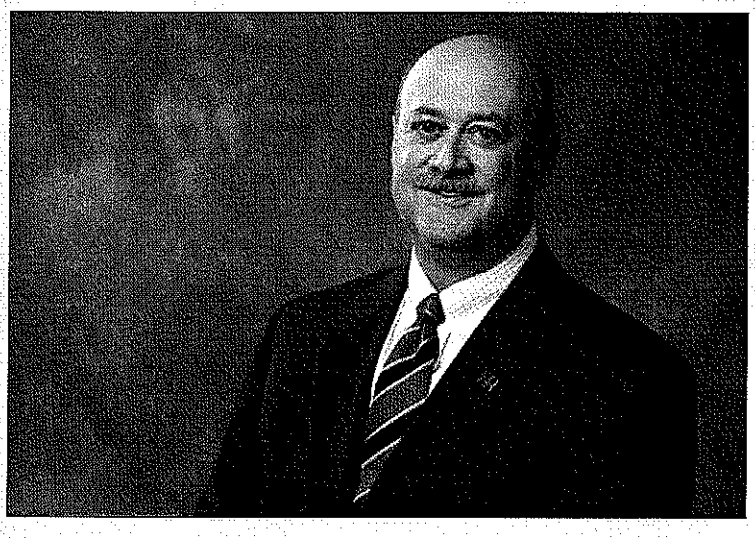


HOM's Vice President for Medical Affairs, Dr. Michael Paletta, contributed an article to the Grand Rapids Press on May 29 that serves as an important reminder to us that patient care can take many forms. Here it is in it's entirety:

"Thank you sir, for stopping by."

Editor's note: One of the services provided by Hospice of Michigan is a medical student program in which young doctors in training are exposed to end-of-life care through team meetings and visits to patients, with Hospice of Michigan doctors serving as leaders and mentors. The following story, related by a Hospice of Michigan physician who served in Iraq in 2007, is from one of those visits.

BY DR. MICHAEL J. PALETTA

Don was an elderly man in the final phase of heart failure. Weaker and sicker despite multiple hospital and ER trips, he "gave up" after his doctor said there was nothing more to be done. He became withdrawn and began refusing care. His daughter learned from a team member that one of the Hospice of Michigan doctors had done military service, so she asked for a home visit.

Don was a World War II veteran who had stayed in touch with his Army Air Corps squadron mates but was the last survivor, as each in turn had passed away. His daughter thought perhaps a fellow vet could get past Don's stoicism and despair. I was a good fit for that mission because I am a soldier and a physician who served Iraq in 2007.

A medical student accompanied me, and we arrived to find Don in a makeshift bed on his couch. Don made it clear he didn't want any doctoring, but I said I knew he had been an Air Corps crewman in a B-17 bomber, and would he tell me a bit about that? We spent the next 40 minutes talking about aerial gunnery and altitude sickness, about being hypoxic and being homesick. I asked him about England and France. He asked me about Baghdad and Fallujah.

We laughed when we figured out that he'd been a 19-year-old kid who feared his 50-year-old commanding officer, and I'd been a 50-year-old CO struggling to keep pace with my 19-year-old airmen. He told me of cradling the body of his best buddy, killed by flak over Germany, for the six-hour flight back to England. I told him about zipping body bags over dead soldiers the same age as my son. When I saw he was tiring, I stood up to leave and thanked him for his service. He gave me a little half-salute and, with tears in his eyes, said, "Thank you. sir, for stopping by."

When we got out on the porch, his daughter was sobbing. "He hasn't spoken a word to anyone in a week," she said, and added, "You know, he's never told us any of those things from the war. He never talked about it." The medical student had trouble describing what he'd observed. "You didn't do anything," he said. "No history, no exam, you didn't ask about his meds or anything. And the nurses said he was angry and depressed. He didn't seem like that at all."

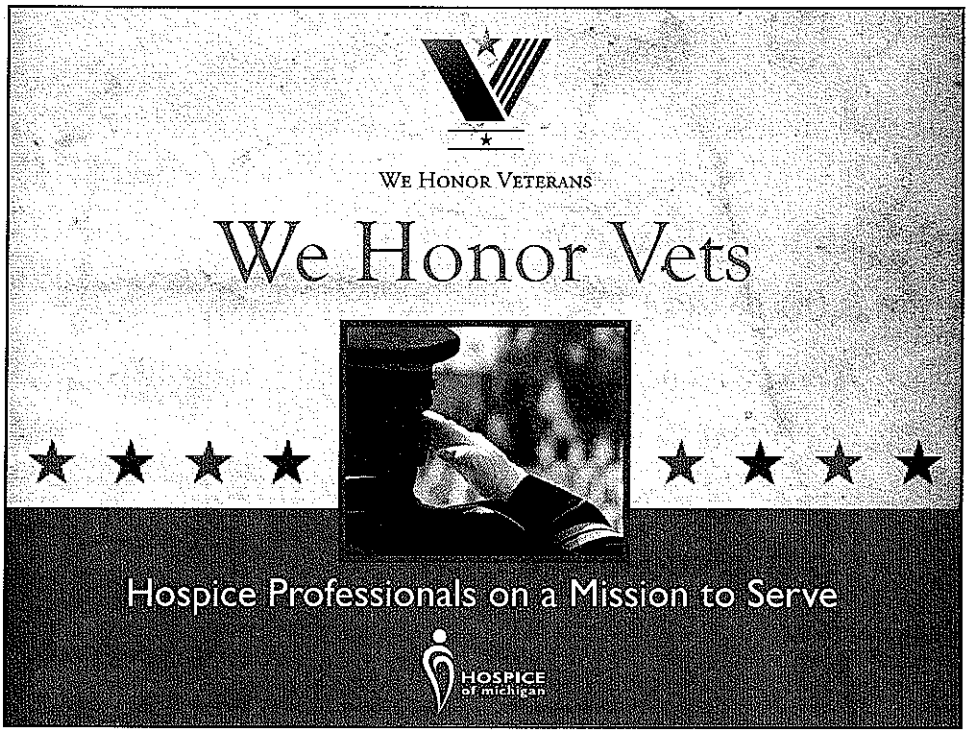
How can we, who do this blessed work, explain to others about the "Sacred Space" — that is — the circle around the patient and family within which compassion can be at work, and where peace and joy can be reclaimed?

Don extended to me something more precious than a Distinguished Flying Cross. He offered his acceptance, his trust and, for a brief moment, his transcendence to the man he is in his mind, without the ravages of age and a failing heart.

There would be time later for blood pressure readings and med changes. I told his daughter that he would probably go along with our care plan, and he did. He died, peacefully about 10 days later.

I'm not sure I can define the Sacred Space. But I know when I've been there.

Michael J. Paletta is vice president of medical affairs for Hospice of Michigan, a nonprofit service with offices at 989 Spaulding SE In Ada. He is a retired colonel and surgeon general in the Michigan Air National Guard, who served in Iraq in 2007. He is a distinguished fellow of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine.



What is We Honor Veterans (WHV)?

- National awareness and action campaign
- Developed by NHPCO and VA
- Encourages partnerships (hospices, state hospice organizations and VA facilities)

We Honor Veterans

Hospice of michigan

Why WHV?

- 25% of all deaths
- 8,000+ Vets D/C back to MI yearly
- A vast majority of Veterans are not enrolled in VA
- WHV creates a culture of Veteran-centric end-of-life care

What is "Veteran-centric"?

Veteran-Centric is 3-Pronged:

1. Focuses on Veterans
2. Requires Veteran responsibility and accountability
3. Depends on communication, coordination and collaboration among healthcare providers

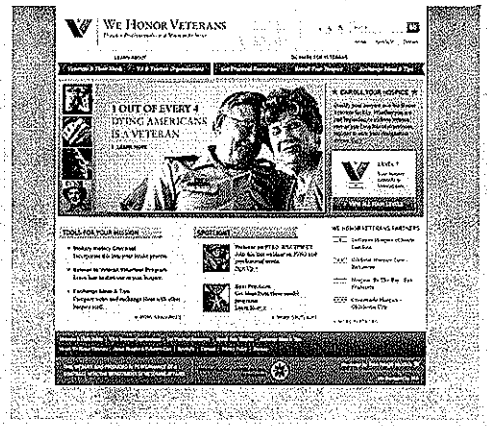
We Honor Veterans Campaign Goals

- Promote Veteran-centric education/care
- Increase organizational capacity to serve Veterans
- Support development of strategic partnerships
- Increase access and improve quality

We Honor Veterans

www.WeHonorVeterans.org

- Centralized Information
- Educational
- Resources
- Partnerships



Email: veterans@nhpco.org

We Honor Veterans

www.WeHonorVeterans.org

Resources

- ✓Brochures
- ✓PowerPoints
- ✓Ad Slick
- ✓Marketplace
- ✓Data & Stats
- ✓Miscellaneous

We Honor Veterans

HOSPICE of michigan

Levels of Commitment

Recruit: Get oriented and commit

Level 1: Provide Veteran-centric education

Level 2: Build organizational capacity

Level 3: Develop and strengthen relationships

Level 4: Increase access, improve quality

We Honor Veterans

HOSPICE of michigan

Levels 1 – 4 Categories of Activities

1. Education
2. Organizational policies and procedures integration
3. Hospice-Veteran Partnerships (HVP)

Level 1 Activities

1. Education
   - ✓Conduct a minimum of vet-specific presentations for staff/volunteers
2. Organizational policies and procedures
   - ✓Review Military History Checklist
   - ✓Integrate into admission process

Level 1 Activities (Cont'd)

3. Hospice-Veteran Partnerships (HVP)
   - ✓Identify designated Hospice and Palliative Care contact person
   - ✓Review HVP PowerPoint presentation

HOM Saginaw is the first HOM team to achieve Level I

WHV: What's in it for us?

Hospice Provider Benefits:

- Extends our commitment to the communities we serve
- Provides quality EOL care to Veterans
- Expands referring relationships with VA
- Allows us to serve those who served

WHV: What's in it for us?

VA Benefits:

- Greater confidence in making referrals to community providers
- Enhanced ability to identify providers that have Vet-specific skills/knowledge
- Heightened satisfaction in being able to honor Vets' preferences to go home

HOM Engagement

✓WHV Committee

✓HOM Saginaw =

✓Michigan Dept. of Military & Vet Affairs

✓Michigan Senate Vet Affairs Committee