

Nurses can need as much support as patients during tough times

Working up to 10 hours a day, dealing with stressful and emotional situations like the death of a patient, and trying to balance work and family are just some of the things a geriatrics nurse deals with every day.

Kokee Abajobir, a nurse at StayWell Manor Village in Calgary, said that working as a nurse in a home can take a personal toll.



Kokee Abajobir, a nurse at StayWell Manor Village, has developed a strong relationship with her patient, Frank Lindley Byrne, in her day-to-day interactions with him. Photo: Kaila Sept/Calgary Journal

“(The job) stays with you even when you go home. You can’t really turn it off,” Abajobir said. “It does affect you somewhat. You just have to remind yourself it is part of the job, things happen. Be happy with what you do and give it your all. It is hard sometimes.”

Abajobir has two jobs — she works up to 10 hours at StayWell Manor Village, which houses seniors who live independently with little care, as well as seniors who require more assistance every day, and then she goes home and takes care of her two children.

“It works good for my family life, the shift work,” Abajobir said. “You can also apply it (to) yourself and use it, it’s lifetime knowledge. You can always help, and I always feel better after

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helping someone.”

She said that she relies on the experience of other nurses to get her through the tough parts of the job, like when she experienced her first patient passing away. She was worried that it would happen on her shift, and when it did, she knew where to turn.

“Our nurses and (our) wellness co-ordinator (Tracy Stephens) have been through a lot of experiences and we do go talk to them,” Abajobir said. “It is a very open environment, everyone talks (when a patient passes away). When I experienced my first patient death, I had support.”

She said that taking care of the elderly can be a very emotional job and unpleasant if a patient is in pain or dying. She said it can cause a lot of emotional stress, and that it can affect everyone in many ways. She added it is important to be open about what you are feeling and that there is always assistance available for the nursing staff to help get over any traumatic event.

“It’s important to talk to others and learn their experiences and take from that what you can and be happy with that. You have to be able to take care of yourself,” Abajobir said.

Ninety-year-old Frank Lindley Byrne, who lives independently at StayWell Manor Village but receives some support from the nursing staff, said he loves how friendly the nurses are and how he has built great relationships with people like Abajobir.

“The staff here is excellent. We each carry a button that you can press and the nurses will appear immediately,” Byrne said. “We have good friendships and they really look after us. The whole staff takes good care of us. We have lots of fun.”

Byrne said that after his wife passed away, he wanted to live somewhere that offered a little extra help.

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“The nurses make you feel less alone, and more like you are at home,” he said.

Abajobir often takes care of Byrne and said she loves the relationships that she has with her patients.

“You always build relationships with people,” Abajobir said.

“For example, Frank does a movie night for the residents. He always talks about movies and he tests you about history, so you have that bond. Once they are comfy with you, they believe in you.”

Tracy Stephens, who has been director of wellness at StayWell Manor Village for four years, said the fact that the staff is close-knit is what gets them through the toughest times.

“It can be a very demanding job. We experience burn out,” Stephens said. “It’s good that sometimes when we don’t see it in ourselves, we see it in each other.”

Stephens said that if one of them notices the other is tired, drained and finding it difficult to get through the day, they will pull each other into respective offices and tell them that they need a break.

During the summer, a few of the patients living at StayWell Manor Village passed away, which was hard on the staff. She said in the event of a traumatic situation, the staff does a team debriefing and give support to those who need it. They talk about the incident and everyone explains how they feel about the situation. She said they also have counselling services offered at all times.

“Generally the relationships we create with patients have ended because of death,” Stephens said. “So it affects the entire team. There are so many examples, so how we deal with that is the debriefing and talking with our colleagues.”

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“There’s always a strong bond, and the management is here 10 hours a day,” she said. “We essentially live with these people Monday to Friday, so of course you build special relationships with people. Definitely there is closeness through the entire staff as well as the residents.”

Both Stephens and Abajobir mention that they take time to themselves to get over any stressful days. They take bubble baths, get massages, and even participate in retail therapy. They both stressed that it is important to take care of yourself during the tough times.