

Pathways Hospice

Compassionate care at the end of life

by nancy nichols

When a loved one's life is near its end, grief may engulf you while you watch a lovely part of your world begin to fade away.

As you grapple with the reality of losing a person you love, you may also bear the considerable responsibility of doing the right thing for someone who deserves the best.

According to the National Alliance for Caregiving, about 66 million Americans — and nearly a third of all U.S. households — are involved in caregiving for a family member or friend. Many of those receiving care are near the end of life because of illness or old age.

Before becoming overwhelmed by the thought of looking after such a loved one, consider seeking assistance from an organization that specializes in compassionate end-of-life care.

That's the focus of Pathways Hospice, a nonprofit organization serving residents of Larimer County and western Weld County.

Pathways Hospice provides medical and comfort care for individuals navigating the last period of their life as well as support for families, caregivers and those mourning the loss of a loved one.

Pathways got its start in 1978 when a group of Loveland nurses whose friend was dying came together to create a care team for their friend. Since then, Pathways has grown to encompass a staff of 130 professionals and 280 volunteers who provide expert care to members of our community who are dying.

According to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, at the center of hospice care is the belief that "each of us has the right to die pain-free and with dignity, and that our families will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so."

A recent article in *The New Yorker* titled "Letting Go," by Atul Gawande, M.D., gives insights into the value of hospice care. Dr. Gawande writes, "For all but our most recent history, dying was typically a brief process. Whether the cause was childhood infection, difficult childbirth, heart attack, or pneumonia, the interval between recognizing that you had a life-threatening ailment and death was often just a matter of days or weeks

"These days, swift catastrophic illness is the exception," writes Dr. Gawande. "For most people, death comes only after long medical struggle with an incurable condition — advanced cancer, progressive organ failure

(usually the heart, kidney, or liver), or the multiple debilities of very old age. In all such cases, death is certain, but the timing isn't."

It is at this point, when the patient's condition cannot be reversed (or when the patient chooses not to pursue curative treatment), that hospice professionals can step in to improve the quality of the patient's life for the time that remains.

The Pathways staff includes physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, certified nursing assistants and therapists, including art and music therapists. Staff members care for patients wherever they reside — at their house, assisted-living center or nursing home. Patients can also receive care at Pathways Hospice Care Center at McKee Medical Center in Loveland.

In 2009, more than 1,000 patients received care from Pathways, with about 140 people receiving care at any one time.

Martha Fellure of Loveland lost her mother several years ago. During her mother's final days at Pathways Hospice Care Center, Fellure wrote: "I'm so thankful for the provision of this place where I can quietly release my mother. It is a place where I can reflect on our relationship and all she's been to me ... a place where I can honestly face the inevitable regrets and where I can joyfully reminisce, holding close the precious memories of a lifetime."

Pathways Hospice places a strong emphasis on helping those in grief. Visitors to the Fort Collins office (305 Carpenter Road) will find an expansive bereavement center serving people of all ages, from children too young to express their feelings with words to senior citizens who may need to learn new life skills to be able to live alone for the first time. Resources include various counseling and therapy programs, an extensive lending library of books and audiovisual materials, and an outdoor garden labyrinth for contemplation. ★

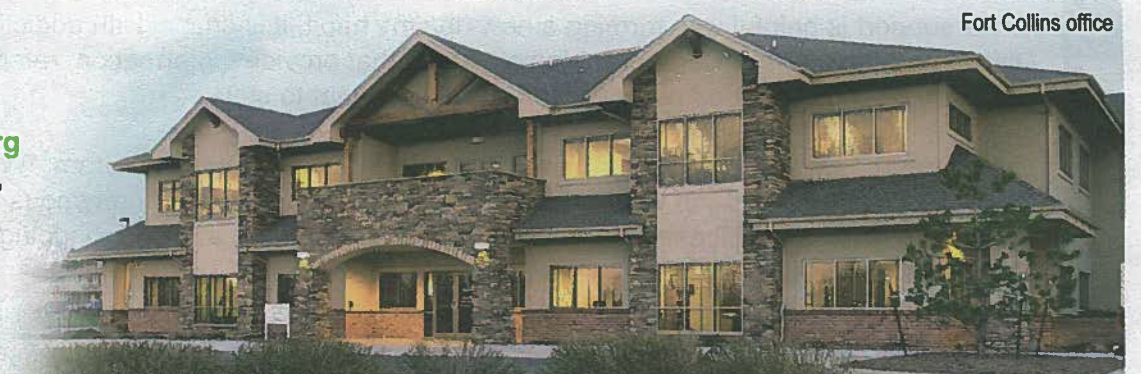


"When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight."

—Kahlil Gibran

Pathways Hospice  [®]
Community Care for Northern Colorado

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Pathways Hospice, formerly known as Hospice of Larimer County, is a nonprofit, United Way affiliate agency with offices in Fort Collins/Loveland and Windsor, and a care center at McKee. Payment options include Medicare, Medicaid and most commercial insurance plans. All local hospice-appropriate patients accepted regardless of financial or insurance circumstances.



Fort Collins office