

'Still me'

Hospice of Holland introduces new dementia program

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Dementia often takes away everything that makes someone a somebody.

It causes loss of cognitive ability and mental deterioration, sometimes leaving caregivers and family members feeling like their loved one has been taken from them.

Hospice of Holland is hoping to change that with its newly-launched "Still Me" care program.

Counseling Services Director for Hospice of Holland, Stacey Wakeley, said the program, which launched last week, is centered around building meaningful interactions with dementia patients.

Although Hospice of Holland has always accepted dementia patients, the program takes a different approach to working with them.

"Often times, the patient's personality (and) their memories have changed or aren't there anymore. This is still that person. They are still in there, and there are ways to connect with them," Wakeley said of the program's name.

Through the program, staff at Hospice of Holland fill out detailed questionnaires for each of their de-



A stress ball and a string of beads are some of the items in the SOS kits which patients use to stimulate their five senses. Below, Hospice of Holland volunteer coordinator Ginger Hollenmans reads a book with volunteer Donna Matula during volunteer training for the "Still Me" dementia program. LISA ERMAK/SENTINEL STAFF

mentia patients and obtain historical biographical information, including what they like, dislike and what their hobbies are.

Wakeley said this approach is part of making sure dementia patients receive individualized care and that staff learn as much as possible about the patients they work with.

They've also introduced stimulation of senses kits, or SOS kits, which provide comfort for patients and stimulate all five senses as sensory stimulation for dementia patients can decrease agitation and restlessness and improve sleep.

The kits equip patients with textured fabrics, stress balls, picture books and CDs with sing-alongs of well-known songs.

Family members are also encouraged to bring in specific items that might trigger memories or bring comfort to their loved one.

"We set high expectations as an organization on satisfying the needs of our end-of-life patients. This is a growing patient population, and we feel it's our responsibility to under-



stand the dynamics of this illness and meet the needs of these individuals and their family members," said Denise Stancill, director of business development for Hospice of Holland.

Wakeley said while the program has only been going for about a week, staff is expecting great things to come from it, mostly positive results for their patients.

In addition to meeting the needs of the patients, "Still Me" offers education to the clinical community on simple solutions they can use to help ease the mind, address troubling behaviors and treat patient symptoms with a respectful and dignified approach.

For more information about the program, call (616) 396-2972.