

Visiting the Sick . . .

(As part of our ongoing commitment to continue focusing on the works of mercy, this month we will explore the ways St. Leo's ministers to the sick and supports those who are grieving.)

Illness is often a lonely, scary experience but with the interventions and support of one's medical team and natural and faith families it can become a journey of growth, healing and community.

St. Leo's has been blessed to have the services of faith community nurses for 26 years. In fact the program was first piloted here by Good Samaritan Hospital (now TriHealth) and now has expanded to several other sites that minister to communities that serve people often at the margins.



Mary Beth Basch, current faith community nurse has been at St. Leo's for 20 years. During that time the population she serves has changed but her commitment to be present and walk with people in their prevention, sickness, healing and dying has been constant.

It's not a job with clearly defined parameters. No day is alike. Faith community nurses need to be flexible and creative and able to meet the need that presents itself at that moment. Over her two decades at St. Leo's Mary Beth has offered health screenings, scheduled appointments, supported follow-up to doctors' visits and helped people find a medical home and provided a network of after-care. She did a group for women in a chemical dependency half-way house and continues to offer a listening group for women at The Villages at Roll Hill twice a month.

For the past several years, her work has been primarily with African refugees fleeing genocide. Seeing a doctor or being concerned about one's health simply wasn't a priority when bullets were flying and everything had to be left behind. Many could speak but not read or write in their native language. A few had had some education. Modern medical practices and devices were often terrifying. Imagine being told to lie still in a closed MRI machine and not understanding what was going on.

There was a lot of basic health care needed in the beginning—routine exams, treating ongoing diseases and learning how to make and keep medical appointments. Without a translator, the work was extremely difficult so TriHealth added a community health worker who spoke the language and could explain what was going on. Many still need the aid of a translator and help getting to appointments and following through with doctor recommendations. Though it may not fit in the usual job description, reading mail and

helping fill out governmental forms is a needed service and reinforces the trust that is needed in this kind of ministry.



Obed Nkuriragenda a native of Rwanda who himself has experienced the genocidal wars in his home country works with Mary Beth as a community health

worker. Together they go each week to many of the refugees' homes and help them set up medication for the week and trouble shoot anything that might need attention.

Luz Ruvalcaba-Alvarez a native Spanish speaker serves as community health worker for the Hispanic community and is a strong advocate for them.



The approach of the faith community nurse is holistic and involves not just caring for physical health s, but also emotional, relational and spiritual needs. This kind of nursing helps increase trust and empower people to begin to take responsibility for their own health care. It creates the kind of setting in which people can identify and ask for what they need.

Realizing that being able to understand and use English was necessary in their adjusting to life in a new country, the refugees asked for ESL and citizenship classes and TriHealth generously provided them. Many are learning to read and write for the first time and others are working on citizenship.

An often quoted prayer of Cardinal Newman seems to describe the ministry of the faith community nurse:

*Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home--
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet;
I do not ask to see the distant scene--
one step enough for me...*

Bringing health and wholeness through the guidance of the spirit—one step, one person at a time.

The Healing Power of the Sacrament of the Sick...

It used to be that it wasn't until someone was dying that she received the Sacrament of the Sick—in fact it used to be called "Extreme Unction." Some people still are hesitant to ask for the sacrament because they fear receiving it means that they are dying. The Sacrament of the Sick is so much more. It is a visible sign of God's love and desire to be present with a person and allay their fears and provide support as they face their illness.