



Sentara RMH Hospice

Placement Description

- Support for terminally ill and their families
- Grief and loss issues.

Intern or Field Placement Responsibilities/Opportunities

- Assist in organization and implementation of projects, conferences, groups, volunteer training
- Attend team meetings, volunteer support meetings, volunteer training, staff inservices
- Research projects (potential)
- Direct patient and family contact (after complete training)
- Attend grief support group and assist with phone calls to bereaved family members
- Office duties

Other Notes

Good to do training the semester before placement

Contact Information

- Contact Person: Peggy Brubaker (Volunteer Coordinator)
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Read about students' experiences at this site below:

Spring 2024 – Emily Triplett

I completed my field placement at Sentara Hospice during the Spring 2024 semester. The mission of Sentara Hospice is to provide comfort care to individuals with terminal illness with a 6-month prognosis. Sentara Hospice provides comfort care through a holistic model, which integrates spiritual, psychological and medical care. Some services provided include medication management (including pain and symptom management), at-home healthcare services (bathing, nurse visits), medical equipment, direct counseling, clergy consultations and bereavement services.

In my role as an intern, I had the ability to perform a variety of administrative tasks, including updating the hospice census, preparing admission packets for new patients, preparing informational packets, and preparing grief packets/pamphlets. In addition to these tasks, one of the projects I worked on for this semester was updating the counseling resources guide. In creating this guide, I collected information about local counseling resources in the Harrisonburg and surrounding areas. For example, information about what insurances different locations accept, what specialties they have, and if telehealth services are provided.

In addition to the administrative tasks I have completed throughout the semester, I have also had the opportunity to get a lot of direct patient experience. After completing a 4 hour long volunteer training, I was able to make weekly visits with two different patients, one in their home, and another at a nursing facility. During my patient visits, I would provide companionship to my patients, including talking to them, playing games, watching TV, going on walks, etc. I also had to complete documentation of my patient visits, which was also great experience. Overall, I really enjoyed my time at my site. I was able to get a lot of experience with direct patient interactions and care, which was the main thing I was hoping to learn from this experience. I also got a lot of experience with paperwork and documentation through the administrative tasks I completed, which was also very valuable to know for the future. Obviously, interning at a hospice is not going to be the right fit for everyone. One potential disadvantage is that there is always a chance that a patient you're visiting is going to die, and sometimes you have to have some hard conversations with the patient and their family about death and dying. Although this was not an issue for me during my internship, if individuals are not in a mental place to have those hard conversations or are uncomfortable with the concept of death, then interning at a hospice might be difficult. However, all of the training at the beginning of the semester was very thorough and helped relieve any initial anxieties I felt, because the training prepared me for anything I would have to deal with on a visit. Also, the volunteer coordinator and other staff acted as a great support system throughout my internship, which definitely helped me feel more comfortable.

Throughout my time interning at Sentara Hospice, I have gained a lot of skills and had



the opportunity to learn a lot. As a result of my patient visits, I have learned about the importance of documentation, as well as gained more experience in how social factors can play an important role in an individual's life. Also, I have built my active listening, rapport building, and boundary-setting skills. Overall, the experiences I've had at hospice have helped me learn how much I enjoy working with people and trying to help and provide support in times of need. My experiences have been so positive that I intend to continue volunteering for a different hospice during my free time after I graduate!

Applying my site experience to the Psychology major, I believe the material I learned in Psychology of Adulthood and Social Psychology helped me most during my time at Sentara Hospice. In my Social Psychology course, we learned about how different group dynamics can have an impact on the individual. This is definitely something I've seen reflected in my patient visits. For example, the social dynamic is much different between a patient who is living at home with their family and a patient who is living in a nursing facility. Even the dynamics of what family member or facility staff member is taking care of the patient on a certain day can have a huge impact on their mood and how they interact with others. In my Psychology of Adulthood class, we talked about lifespan development, including aging and how physical and mental health can change in the later years of life, as well as when coping with grief. For my Psychology of Adulthood class, I also completed a group project which focused on using different forms of journaling as a coping strategy for dealing with grief. The knowledge I gained from learning about aging, death, and grief from Psychology of Adulthood was directly applicable to my experience at Sentara Hospice!

For my contribution project at my site, I decided to create a Multi-Faith/Religion Guide to be incorporated into the volunteer training binder. When completing the research for my project, I found that religion can impact how an individual conceptualizes death and dying, their levels of death anxiety, and how they cope with grief during a period of bereavement. Also, since hospice is a holistic model of care which includes spiritual care, I thought it could be valuable to create a religion guide for volunteers so they can have a better understanding of some of the major religions in case they come across these religions on their patient visits. Having more extensive knowledge of different religions can help volunteers in their rapport-building with patients, in order to help the patient and their family in a way that is respectful to their religious beliefs. For the Multi-Faith/Religion guide, I included thirteen different religions/religious sects, and a little bit of information about each religion. I included information about the general beliefs, any holy texts, what a typical religious/worship service looks like, any dietary restrictions or major holidays, and what some of the death/grief related beliefs are within that religion.

Fall 2023 - Sophie Rice

Sentara Hospice's mission is to improve comfort and quality of life and providing dignity in death. Hospice care is for patients with a prognosis of six months or less. Sentara focuses on offering patients holistic and palliative care. Diagnoses vary from senile degeneration of the brain, cancer, heart failure, and others. Sentara Hospice staff consists of nurses, nurse practitioners, medical directors, volunteer coordinators, volunteers, pastoral care, bereavement



coordinators, home health aides, and social workers. Sentara hospice offers many services to patients, including spiritual services, bereavement services, medical equipment, medications, volunteers, and respite. My internship with Sentara offered many opportunities and experiences. Among those, I attended weekly Interdisciplinary Team meetings, had one-on-one visits with patients, attended events, and did administrative work in the office.

Visiting patients was the best opportunity that my internship awarded me. I had two or three patients at a time and most of my patient visits were in-home. This exposed me to many different environments and gave me the chance to observe more of what hospice care looks like in home. Visiting patients in facilities was also beneficial in seeing the more medical side of hospice care. When visiting patients, depending on the individual and their preferences and abilities, I offered companionship, we would do art therapy, I offered respite for caregivers, helped with tasks around the house, and played games. This experience was transformative for me, and it challenged me to be more patient and observant.

One thing that I observed during patient visits was that a lot of my patients with Alzheimer's complained about being bored. After doing a lot of research on senile neurodegenerative diseases, I discovered that sensory activities and expressive therapy are very beneficial for Alzheimer's patients. Alzheimer's patients have trouble adjusting to the lack of autonomy, and symptoms of the disease such as decreased ability to communicate verbally and paranoia. The rapid decline in abilities due to neurodegenerative diseases causes patients to feel isolated and insecure. Expressive therapy encourages patients to focus on what they still can do, rather than what they can't do. This can help to improve their self-esteem and re-establish a sense of identity. For my contribution project, I designed a variety of activities that other volunteers can use and implement with their patients who have Alzheimer's. I put together and organized a box of sensory toys and activities along with directions and materials. Giving patients an activity and task gives them a chance to focus on something besides their diagnosis. I hope that other volunteers will implement these activities with patients and find it helpful for providing entertainment and distraction for patients.

There are very few disadvantages to this site placement. I found myself driving a lot to patients' houses which sometimes were far away. I personally don't mind driving, and I like it, but I can see how this may be an obstacle to someone else. I also did reach burnout, but that's also because I had a heavy courseload while doing my field placement. I think burnout can happen regardless of a student's site placement. Hospice care workers reach compassion fatigue and burnout very easily, and it's crucial to practice many self-care strategies to combat burnout and compassion fatigue. Because of my schoolwork, it was difficult to engage in self-care as much as I wanted to and as much as I needed to. I would advise students to be aware of their class schedule and to go into Field Placement with a plan for self-care strategies and to practice them often. My colleagues and supervisor were incredibly supportive and were great resources and I'm very grateful for that. Having a support system to confide in or turn to when needing guidance or more encouragement is very important, especially in this field, and my coworkers and supervisor offered me that. We had a couple events for the hospice staff, and it was a great chance for us all to hang out and unwind.

There are many advantages to this site placement. First, the Sentara Hospice staff are amazing, and they were so welcoming to me. They were very supportive and were always sure to



include me. Second, one-on-one visits with patients are very rewarding and provide experience working closely with patients from a medical lens. Interacting with patient's family members was also helpful in gaining a better understanding of the grief process and how family and caregivers are impacted. Another advantage is that working closely with patients gave me exposure to different disorders in the DSM-5 and also gave me exposure to different health conditions and terminal illnesses. The weekly interdisciplinary meetings broadened my knowledge of different health conditions, terminal illnesses, and medical terminology. Another advantage of this site placement is exposure for future career paths. I'm very interested in clinical geropsychology and hospice and I'm currently in the process of applying to graduate programs for clinical mental health counseling. Interning with Sentara Hospice gave me exposure to the field and working with the geriatric population. This reassured me that I do want to continue pursuing these interest areas and helped me to narrow down my interests and specialties that I may want to pursue. Another advantage is that I now feel better prepared to help someone who may be dealing with grief or the loss of a loved one. This experience has made me grow so much as a person and has reminded me to always greet people with compassion.

The content I learned in Abnormal Psychology was very helpful during one-on-one visits with patients. In particular, knowledge of disorders in the DSM-5 equipped me to interact with patients accordingly. In Biopsychology, we learned about dementia and neurodegenerative diseases. This content equipped me with the background information I needed to understand my patients who had dementia or other terminal illnesses a bit better. In Life Span Development, we learned about the ageing process and some aspects of dying and grief. This was very beneficial for understanding the psychology behind hospice patients and helped me to gain a better understanding of their situation and what they might be feeling. In Counseling Psychology, I learned different methods of counseling and counseling for different populations, and I was able to apply this knowledge when working with patients. Social Psychology provided me with knowledge about the social aspects of the dying process.

My experience interning for Sentara Hospice was incredible and granted me many opportunities. I was able to learn a lot from experience that I otherwise would not have learned in a classroom. This internship helped me grow in many aspects, including my career goals and my personal life. My field placement at Sentara Hospice is an experience that I will cherish my whole life and it has served as a catalyst for my future career path. I'm very grateful for this opportunity, everything I learned, and all the incredible people I met and worked with.