

Media Release

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Contact: Jenni Williams
E-Mail: jlwilliams@havenhospice.org

Phone: 352-271-4655
Fax: 352-379-6286



Hospice physician Geraldine Bichier: *Keeping watch over her patients' needs and wishes*

(GAINESVILLE, Fla.)— A hospice physician is reminded every day that patients have different needs and wishes. “I feel like I oughta be up and at ‘em,” says Mr. B., who is 97 years old and had been taking care of himself until recently. “What can you do for me?”

“That’s what I’m here to find out,” says Haven Hospice physician Geraldine Bichier, who is seeing him for the first time. She learns that Mr. B. is frustrated by a lack of energy and appetite. But at the same time, he would like his family and caregiver to understand that he is letting go. “They want to keep me alive and I don’t know why,” he says.



Dr. Bichier takes his hands in hers and asks how he’s feeling. She listens to his concerns and determines that some of his medications can be adjusted to make him feel better. She is seeing him at home, in his own bed, where he is most comfortable, and she talks with the family friend who has been caring for him. This woman also cared for her own son and Mr. B.’s wife with Haven’s help.

Dr. Bichier appreciates being given the opportunity to know patients, their families and caregivers in the home. “It’s good to see them in their environment because you see what they live with every day and how they cope,” she says. “You see what they can and cannot do and how the family members help each other, which is not always apparent in the office or care center setting. Home visits also give family members the opportunity to express their concerns.

At one visit a wife is worried about an event that Dr. Bichier believes may have been a heart attack. As a result, the patient has fluid on his lungs and a cough. His heart is getting worse, and his wife is becoming more and more worried about what is going to happen. Dr. Bichier asks them to call if they need anything. She encourages the patient to take his morphine to improve oxygen flow to his heart so it will be under less stress. It will also help with his breathing and his cough. She understands that he has a lot to remember. “You’ll take care of yourself?” she says. “I’m going to put this medicine right here in my pocket,” he replies. She leaves with a bag of home grown squash.

“I’ve learned a lot about the different ways people face the end of life,” says Dr. Bichier, who logs 200 – 300 miles a week visiting patients in their homes, nursing homes and the other facilities that Haven serves. At Mrs. D.’s home, her four daughters have posted lists of her medications and their phone numbers—everything her caregivers need to know. Mrs. D. is visibly touched by Dr. Bichier’s concern and term of endearment for her, “my love.” “You’re such a nice doctor,” she says, “so important to your patients. I don’t know if they tell you enough. You’re like a guardian angel.”

PHOTO CAPTION: Dr. Geraldine Bichier with her patient, W.F. Blackwell.

About Geraldine Bichier, M.D.

A board-certified nephrologist (kidney specialist), Dr. Bichier has served as associate medical director of Haven’s Gainesville home and nursing home teams since 2008. Born in Leicestershire, England, Bichier earned her medical degree at the University of Wales College of Medicine (then the Welsh National School of Medicine). She served a nephrology fellowship at the University of Florida, followed by a residency in internal medicine at the University of California at San Diego Medical Center. From 1998 until 2001, she practiced with the Valley Nephrology Medical Group in Madera/Fresno, Calif., and returned to Gainesville as an assistant professor and principal investigator at the University of Florida Center for Clinical Trials Research.

About Haven Hospice

Haven Hospice is North Florida’s expert in end-of-life and palliative care and is one of three 2008 Circle of Life Award® winners nationwide to be recognized as leaders in improving the care of patients near the end of life or with life-threatening conditions. Haven Hospice has also been recognized as a Florida Pacesetter for its leadership in promoting living wills. Haven Hospice has served more than 45,000 patients and families since 1979 and has been licensed in Florida as a not-for-profit hospice since 1980. For more information, visit www.havenhospice.org or call 800-727-1889.

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