

Media Release

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Hospice physician Michelle Boatwright helps patients to feel better

(LAKE CITY, Fla.)— It's morning report time at the Haven Hospice Suwannee Valley Care Center, where a team of nurses, a social worker, the care center's administrator, Polly Tyler, and associate medical director Dr. Michelle Boatwright are discussing the patients and families in their care. They are focused on their concern for making each patient comfortable as well as providing needed support for their families who are preparing to lose someone they love. Each family's circumstances touch them deeply, because "they go through so much," one of the nurses says. The day before, the staff had comforted a husband who had loved his wife for 56 years. She was also a mother and grandmother. "I can see how much it hurts him to be without her," says Dr. Boatwright.

As she begins visiting her patients and their families in the care center, Dr. Boatwright asks each of them what she can do to make a difference in how they feel. For Mr. R., who's about to be a grandfather again, she adjusts his medications to help relieve his pain. "I want to be around long enough to hold that baby and count all his fingers and toes," he tells Dr. Boatwright.

For Betty Fay Moody,

who's feeling well enough to show off her beautiful smile, Dr. Boatwright prescribes a medicine to help relieve her anxiety. "I try to meet my patients and families where they are," she says. "Some of my patients want to be pain-free, even it means sleeping a lot, while others want to be alert and are willing to tolerate some pain.

"Every patient is in a different place," she adds. "You can't have a preconceived idea about what they'll want and need. My job is to figure out what they need and what are the most important things to address that can make a difference to them."

For a young woman who has kept an all-night vigil at her mother's bedside, Dr. Boatwright's job is reassuring her that her mother has no pain. "By helping to prepare families for what to expect," she says, "they cope better when the time comes. It helps them to think about what they'll do."



How hard is it to be a hospice physician? “I don’t think it’s depressing,” Dr. Boatwright says. “There are so many good things that we do that might not have happened if Haven wasn’t involved. We can help make patients feel better even if there is no cure for their disease.

“A good hospice doctor has compassion with appropriate boundaries,” she adds. “I frequently share joys and tears with patients, but also need to be present with the next person I see and not carry sorrow with me.”

A Haven physician since 2006, Dr. Boatwright sees herself as a “big-picture person” who appreciates what hospice care is. “It’s one of the few areas of medicine that treats the patient as a whole person and also treats the family.”

Hospice physicians consider it their calling to do as much as they can for each patient as long as it is medically and ethically appropriate. A small gesture like shampooing a patient’s hair, which Dr. Boatwright has done, “may be just the thing to make a patient feel better,” she says, “and that’s why I’m here.”

About Michelle Boatwright, M.D.

Dr. Boatwright has served as associate medical director of Haven Hospice’s Suwannee Valley service area since January 2006, and cares for Haven patients in their homes or nursing homes in six counties. A hospice physician since 2001, she is board-certified in internal medicine, hospice and palliative medicine, and geriatrics. She earned her medical degree and completed a residency and fellowship at the University of South Florida. Dr. Boatwright presented at the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization and International Hospice Conference in Montreal, was the principal investigator of three drug studies, and is the author of a geriatric textbook chapter about hospice care.

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 nearly 50,000 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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