



# The Vestibule of Heaven

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**M**ore than 40 years ago, I was asked to cover for another doctor at this unique little hospital for advanced cancer patients. Although it was just for one morning, I didn't want to go. I saw it as a "burden." After all, my job was to save lives, not care for the dying.

Nevertheless, I went to Calvary that morning — and my life was changed forever. Caring for these patients who were in the final days of their life — easing their physical, emotional, and spiritual pain — in short providing palliative care became my life's work.

"Palliative" comes from the Latin word for coat. In ancient times, a warm comforting coat would be put

around the shoulders of someone suffering from a serious illness when no other treatment or cure could be found.

Even in today's vastly more sophisticated medical world, providing comfort and compassion is still the most important part of caring for those who are dying.

Compassion is what first motivated the remarkable and selfless group of women who started Calvary Hospital more than 100 years

ago bringing destitute women with cancer into their own homes.

The idea of caring for those close to death is sometimes lost in modern medical practice. It is an ancient ideal, expressed by Hippocrates, the great Greek philosopher and founder of medicine, who gave us the oath





that all physicians pledge to uphold.

It was also Hippocrates who said that, “while the young fear death, the old fear dying.” It is the indignity of the dying process that most frightens our patients. At Calvary, we are dedicated to easing that fear for the patient and their families.

Most patients who come to Calvary know they are dying. It is my job to support them as they face the end of their days, to ease the terrible suffering in their bodies and minds, and to cushion the blow of tragedy on the shoulders of their loved ones. We immerse them in a “sea of love.” Physical pain is not difficult to manage or relieve. It is the other pain — emotional, spiritual and psychological — that cannot be treated with a pill.

The opportunity to be with our patients, hold their hands, and ease their pain as they take life’s final journey is an honor I wouldn’t trade for any accolade the “mainstream” medical world has to offer.

Any doctor can diagnose medical symptoms, but at Calvary, we can also

diagnose a broken heart. That’s the number one reason why I am still here at Calvary after 43 years. When I first saw the way the doctors, nurses and supporting professionals of Calvary fought that sense of abandonment with every breath, I knew I had to be a part of this miraculous beacon of humanity — this vestibule of heaven.

I knew absolutely, from the very first morning I spent here, that this place was dedicated to celebrating life — every moment, for every person, no matter how sick or how little time remains. I knew that we would never abandon a patient — never! It was the sacred importance of this mission that so intoxicated me on my first visit that every day since then, I have rushed to work, looking forward to all the joys and tears of this glorious place of life.

If Calvary were to somehow cease to exist, the loss would be felt from here to Heaven. I know that my heart would be broken forever. I would lose that “burden” that became my greatest surprise and the greatest gift of my life. 🍷



# Our Blessing of Peace

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Deep peace of the  
running wave to you.  
Deep peace of the  
flowing air to you.  
Deep peace of the  
gentle night to you.  
Moon and stars  
pour their healing light  
On you.  
Deep peace of God  
be in your heart.

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