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Volunteers offer patients, families hospital comfort

Volunteer Edmonton
Special to the Examiner

A hospital can seem a cold, unwelcoming place. But the Royal Alexandra Hospital is working hard to change that with the help of volunteers.

"When you come into a huge place – whether it's to visit a loved one or to get a procedure done

– you're nervous and lost. There's a level of anxiousness there. A volunteer is there to say, 'It's OK. You don't have to feel this way. I'm going to make sure you're OK.'

"The volunteer is there for an extra level of comfort," says Susan de Seguin, who co-ordinates volunteer services at the Royal Alex.

De Seguin, who has been in her role for two years, came into a strong volunteer program at the Royal Alex. With over 300 people giving parts of their days and evenings, visitors and patients alike are benefiting.

Volunteers interact in many areas of the hospital, including the acute and palliative care units.

Roles vary from delivering newspapers, to pushing around the library book cart, to showing visitors where to go to wait, to stuffing charts with papers, to helping out in emergency, to performing pet therapy.

And while the duties undertaken by volunteers vary, so do those who volunteer.

"We have a huge range," says de Seguin, "from age 16 to those in their 80s."

Many young people want experience as they consider the health care field for employment, while elderly volunteers want to stay busy.

"Many of our volunteers simply want to give back," says de Seguin.

The Royal Alex has many different ways to recruit volunteers. Their website is one popular tool as well as post-secondary website postings. Word of mouth also attracts volunteers.

"We have challenges in attracting enough volunteers," says de Seguin. "Some positions are harder to recruit for, especially in the positions where we need specialized care."

Specialized care positions require volunteers to either have the training required or be willing to take and pay for training. In order to be more effective in recruiting specialized volunteers, de Seguin notes that reimbursement is available for volunteers if they remain for a set period of time.

"Time commitment is a big issue. People are running really busy lives," says de Seguin. "We just do the best we can do with what we have."

To learn more about how you can volunteer with the Royal Alexandra Hospital, visit www.albertahealthservices.ca.

For more information or suggestions for story ideas please contact Evelyn Pham, communications co-ordinator, at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 780-732-6655 or check out their website at www.volunteeredmonton.com

“
When you come into a huge place ... you're nervous and lost.”

– Susan de Seguin,
Volunteer services

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April Event

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