



With the help of Life's Journey, Joe Hall has spent much less time in the hospital. "This is just a miracle," says his wife, Elaine, an inpatient coder at Community South.

Life's Journey patients and their families receive other types of support, too. For example, the Halls worked with a Life's Journey social worker to develop a living will for Joe. The social worker also discussed Joe's end-of-life wishes with the Halls' two adult sons and their wives. "They don't just focus on one little aspect of your life. They look at the big picture," Elaine Hall says.

Before Life's Journey spread across the network, the concept took root at Community Hospital Anderson through a program coordinated by Diane Deberry, CNS. Deberry became interested in palliative care for personal reasons. When her grandfather was diagnosed with prostate cancer, Deberry's mother sent him to live with her.

"When he was ready to pass, I didn't have all the support I needed," Deberry says. "When you work in health care, you do this every day, but when it's your loved one, you need more support. Whenever I'm able to help someone, I think about my grandfather."

Taking Life's Journey

Chronic disease management from a patient's perspective

"We were frequent fliers at the hospital," says Elaine Hall. Between March 2005 and May 2006, her husband, Joe, was an inpatient seven times and was in rehabilitation programs twice. He also visited the emergency room twice for treatment.

Joe Hall's situation is not all that unusual. He suffers from several chronic health issues, including heart problems, respiratory troubles and diabetes. A little over three years ago, Joe went into respiratory failure and his doctor ordered the insertion of a permanent tracheotomy. After the operation, Joe did well for about a year, but then complications brought him back to the hospital again and again.

Needless to say, the Halls were eager to find a way to make those trips less frequent. So Joe enrolled in the Life's Journey program offered by Community Health Network. Life's Journey is what's known as a palliative care program, focusing on patients with complex

chronic illnesses such as congestive heart failure, renal disease, cardiac disease, cancer and stroke. The goal is to enhance patients' quality of life by relieving their symptoms and reducing their suffering.

"If someone has a chronic disease and they're having a hard time working with their symptoms or their having multiple admissions to the hospital, there is a team of people who will work alongside their physician and help them learn to adapt to the disease process," says Jessie

and spiritual advisers who use a multidisciplinary approach to assist patients with complex symptoms, pain, psychosocial and spiritual issues. Though the program offers hospice services when necessary, "it is not an end-of-life program," Westlund says. "It is a program to help people with quality of life."

"A lot of times it was really hard for me to discern if I needed to call the doctor, take him to the ER or wait a day

"They don't just focus on one little aspect of your life. They look at the big picture."

Westlund, a registered nurse who is CEO of Community Home Health Services and founder of the Life's Journey program.

The Life's Journey team is comprised of nurses, social workers, physical therapists

or two," says Elaine Hall, an inpatient coder at Community Hospital South. Life's Journey, on the other hand, has nurses who can help with the decision, "kind of that middle person that we had never had before."

Exceptional Patient Experience

The program's inpatient staff members see 10 to 15 patients per day. The Life's Journey at Home program has 78 to 95 active patients at any given time.

As for Joe Hall, with the help of Life's Journey he has done so well that he was taken off the list of active Life's Journey patients. Elaine Hall believes her husband would have been in and out of the hospital much more often, but since joining the program he has been hospitalized just once.

"This is just a miracle," Elaine Hall says. "Our family doctor had told us last May that we were probably looking at a few months. I think that God touched him but I also think that all of the support that we received from Life's Journey helped him get stronger. This just really bridged the gap." 📌