

Patient says OSF Hospice 'Is for the Living'

A Champaign-based couple which decided to use OSF Hospice care when it expanded to the region says they quickly learned, "hospice is for the living."

Hospice is for patients of all ages with a life-limiting illness and a prognosis of six months or less to live, who have decided not to pursue curative or life prolonging treatment but instead want to focus on palliative (comfort) care.

Steve Denzer was diagnosed with metastatic lung cancer in 2016 and after two surgeries, chemotherapy, and a last-ditch effort at immunotherapy which uses the body's immune system to try to fight cancer, he decided he wanted to, as he put it, "Throw it all out the window and come home and enjoy life."

Remembering her own mother's experience with hospice and how much the care team supported the entire family, his wife Becky convinced her husband that [OSF Hospice](#) would offer him a better quality of life. It did. He gives much of the credit to his care team and Hospice Nurse Karen Davidson who he calls, "the second light of my life." Always ready with a quick quip, he added, "We're a match made in heaven."

Davidson and the care team work with Denzer to set simple goals he can check off his list.

"We went out to eat ... had dinner at a nice restaurant and it was easy. I mean I love it but a couple of months ago I couldn't have done it." He then declared, "Hospice is not for the dying, it's for the living."

Davidson says she was glad that unlike most people, the Denzers didn't wait until Steve's last days to enlist the help of OSF Hospice.

"We get to know that patient. We get to help that patient before the very critical part of passing away. We get to help them enjoy life, to encourage them to do what they have goals for doing and we can't do that if it's too late and we only get to get in there the last day or so."

Becky Denzer echoes Davidson's message. She said it helps to have her husband's OSF Hospice team see him regularly now.

"Then they get to see what he's really like before he ever ends up in that position where he's not himself anymore. And, then that way like Karen would come over and she could see, 'ooh, you're not having a good day,' because she really knows what he's like on a good day."

The Denzers have also visited with a bereavement counselor and Steve was able to get on medication to treat his anxiety that was preventing him from sleeping through the night. Davidson says other members of the care team provide additional support.

"We have a social worker that helps with emotional support but if there's a need for getting a patient away for a little while to give them some rest, then we have that available." She added, "It's about serving the ones that need it. It's from our heart."

Hospice volunteers are also called in to provide respite for family members so they can take care of their own physical and emotional needs. As a caretaker, Becky Denzer says it can be lonely and stressful because you feel entirely responsible for someone's well-being. Now, she finally feels relief from the stress of daily caretaking and Becky can enjoy her husband again.

"Once OSF comes in and then they just kind of relieve that pressure of ... well wait a minute, I've got somebody else in my corner that I can ask. I can get a hold of them as soon as I want instead of 'Oh we'll call you back in a couple of hours.'"

OSF Hospice care became available in the Champaign-Urbana and Danville areas in December, making it the newest region in the Ministry to offer the option which is open to anyone who meets the medical criteria.

[Learn more](#) about the full-range of services OSF Hospice provides.