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Hospice By The Bay in Sonoma County Turns 20

LARKSPUR, CA – (JANUARY 2012) – The non-profit, regional health care provider, **Hospice By The Bay**, the second oldest hospice in the nation and first in California, is celebrating its 20th year of serving patients and families in Sonoma County. HBTB, then Hospice of Marin, was chosen in 1992 by the Sonoma Valley Hospital District to purchase the Valley of the Moon Hospice (VOMH) in the town of Sonoma. The success of these early hospice programs, started by community volunteers, helped launch the national hospice movement – a movement that forever changed how dying patients were cared for in America.

“Hospice By The Bay’s rich history as a pioneer and leader in bringing hospice care to America is something we’re very proud of,” says HBTB CEO Sandra Lew, *LCSW*. “The Sonoma residents who founded Valley of the Moon Hospice in 1979 share in that history as trailblazers. Since 1992, Hospice By The Bay has continued to honor their legacy. We continue to expand our hospice and grief counseling services for patients and families throughout Sonoma County.”

Modeled on the groundbreaking work of Dame Cecily Saunders at St. Christopher’s Hospice in England, the first American hospice was founded in Connecticut in 1974. Saunders’ vision was to offer compassionate care to terminally ill patients to meet their medical, practical, emotional and spiritual needs, minimizing pain and suffering for those facing the end of life.

HBTB was incorporated as Hospice of Marin the next year, in 1975, as a grassroots effort by volunteers in Marin County to provide in-home hospice care and support for patients’ families and caregivers.

In 1978, a group of Sonoma physicians, including Dr. Paul Harrison, and local residents saw the value of this new, holistic model of care for the dying. After a presentation by HOM Medical Director Dr. William Lamers, Jr., describing its pioneering work, the group asked Sonoma Valley Hospital to open a hospice program. Valley of the Moon Hospice was founded in 1979.

Prior to accepting the first patient later that year, VOMH staff and volunteers, including Harrison, attend Hospice of Marin's training about hospice care, including pain and symptom management. HOM was known as a pioneer and leader in the nation's growing hospice care movement, training physicians and others around the country in hospice care.

HOM also joined the national grassroots effort to educate legislators and partner with members of Congress to support Medicare legislation to fund hospice and minimize the financial burden on families caring for seriously ill loved ones. The Medicare Hospice Benefit was made permanent in 1986 and now covers most hospice services, including skilled nursing, medical social services, counseling, home health aide services, prescriptions and medical equipment.

President Emeritus and former HBTB CEO Mary Taverna says, "I feel a great sense of pride in our organization's leadership and participation in hospice history. When we started, we never imagined the number of Americans who would be touched by our efforts." Taverna joined Hospice of Marin as a volunteer nurse and became Executive Director in 1978. She retired from the agency in 2009.

True to its early history, Hospice By The Bay continues to champion efforts to ensure that quality, compassionate end-of-life care is funded as a basic human right. Throughout the recent debates over health care reform, Hospice By The Bay has lobbied legislators, encouraged grassroots letter-writing campaigns and written in favor of access to hospice care. With the option to choose hospice care, "all children and adults with serious illnesses can live out their lives in comfort, with dignity, in their home of choice, surrounded and supported by those they love," says CEO Lew.

Hospice By The Bay is a 501(c)(3) organization that has been serving the Bay Area since 1975. Hospice By The Bay is a regional provider of hospice and palliative care for chronically and terminally ill adults and children. Through its community grief support program, Hospice By The Bay also serves anyone whose life has been affected by the loss of a loved one.

Hospice By The Bay programs are funded through health care reimbursement and charitable donations from community members and businesses. For more information about Hospice By The Bay, call (415) 927-2273, or visit www.hbtb.org.

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