




## JANE – PALLIATIVE CARE

Death isn't easy. It's confronting and arresting and disquieting, prompting questions about life, loss and meaning. But even in the shadow of death and dying, amidst its grief and pain, there is often beauty, quiet dignity and the unmistakable touch of grace. At least that's the experience of RDNS nurse Jane Bourke, Clinical Nurse Consultant, Palliative Care.

Whilst the primary charge of most of RDNS' nurses is to restore health and ensure a better quality of life for clients, Jane's role is located squarely in the world of dying. She acknowledges that it is not a field that many would voluntarily choose, but she is adamant that helping people with a terminal illness to prepare for the last chapter of their lives is a noble pursuit; one that affords her many moments of enormous, albeit subdued, satisfaction.

She explains that it is more natural for people to die in their homes, with their loved ones close to their bed and even closer to their heart, than to die "behind closed doors in some facility." And although her role is indelibly tinged by one of life's most confronting inevitabilities, the job itself is varied and multi-faceted, blending a mix of clinical care, education, mentoring and support.

Over half of her work involves providing nursing care to terminally ill clients to help manage their pain and distress. To achieve this is not always easy and much of her time is spent seeing clients with complex care needs. Effective pain management borders on being an art form and requires careful consideration of all of a client's needs. In each case she says she must work in with the family dynamic, whatever that may be. In most cases she sees families do and say things that are needed; forgiveness is sought, peace is made and relationships are put right. People assume different roles and she acknowledges the privileged part she has to play in the overall situation. She maintains professional boundaries but admits it is hard not to be affected by her work.



In addition to providing direct care, Jane spends a lot of time with other RDNS nurses to help them better care for their own clients. She also teaches palliative care at the RDNS Institute, educating RDNS staff and other healthcare workers about this specialty area that has grown into its own in the last 15 years. She also has an active role on RDNS' Palliative Care Clinical Leadership Group, whose task it is to pursue best practice in palliative care based on the latest research and education.

It's a cool Spring day, and as the rain lightly falls, Jane concedes that her job is emotionally demanding; there is a place for her own tears amidst those of her clients and their families, she explains. She grieves for those she cares for and those she says good-bye to with relentless regularity. But with four children of her own, she explains that most days there isn't a lot of time to dwell too heavily. "It's a normal human reaction to share people's pain and to grieve for them, but when I leave work each day I have to work out what I'm going to cook for dinner, what homework needs doing."

As the late morning sun splinters the high grey cloud, Jane sums up what her job has taught her over the last 18 years. "Live in the moment," she says. "Don't put off what you want to do ... and make the most of who you are and what you've got."

