



David Hitchens

It is a celebration!

Providence hospice services help retired professor give lesson in celebrating life.

"It is a celebration, and that's a surprise to me," says retired professor David Hitchens after several months of hospice care following a diagnosis of inoperable lung cancer. Hospice has given him and his wife Joan the gift of time. Time to make plans. Time to connect and reconnect with loved ones. Time to reflect on life. Time to share memories. Time to laugh. Time to love.

Hitchens, age 72, is dying. He's received hospice services from Providence SoundHomeCare and Hospice in his home in Olympia, Wa., since February and says the choice to go on hospice care after he was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer has been a "great decision." He's already outlived his six-month prognosis. He's not in pain. His family has come together to support him. His friends visit. And many of his

former students have written on a tribute blog about how their former professor impacted their lives.

His 41 years of teaching and questioning at The Evergreen State College in Olympia comes through as he looks around his bedroom and asks, "Am I doing this right?"

Because Hitchens is a teacher – always looking for answers and prodding others to do the same – he wonders if his time on hospice is going according to plan. "The hospice experience for me so far has been different than I could have anticipated because I wasn't sure what having terminal lung cancer was going to mean in terms of how I was going to feel physically. What was going to go on? Was I going to deal with excruciating pain? Was it going to

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spread to my brain? How afraid of this am I? Or am I afraid of it?"

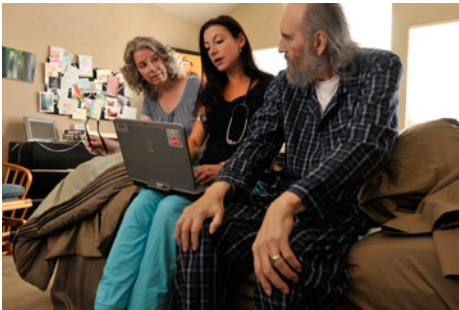
Many remember Hitchens' unique teaching style and openness to different ideas. When evaluating his students, Hitchens always asked them to reflect on what they discovered that surprised them as a consequence of their studies in his class.

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It is a celebration! (continued)



Hitchens now is the one reflecting on his discoveries. “This is one of the big moments and not everybody has the length of time, whatever the ETA is for my expiration date. It’s still out there. I’m coming in for this landing and is everything under control? Am I doing it right? I’m not sure what it means for me. I’m trying to be as real as I know how.”



As Hitchens lives life as a hospice patient, receiving nursing visits once a week, taking advantage of massage therapy and having all of his questions patiently answered, he is surprised to learn that he’s such an exception. Nearly half of families who access hospice services do so in the last two weeks of life. In a medical system designed to fix people and cure diseases, not all physicians are comfortable recommending hospice care to their patients – and even fewer patients and their families are willing to accept it, fearing that they’re “giving up.” But statistics show otherwise.



A study published last year in the New England Journal of Medicine found that terminal lung cancer patients who began receiving hospice care immediately upon diagnosis not only were happier, more mobile and in less pain as the end neared, but also lived nearly three months longer than those who didn’t receive such care. Similar studies have found the same to be true for patients with heart failure and chronic lung disease.

This is Hitchens’ third bout with cancer. The first time – in 1988-89 – he successfully fought Hodgkin’s lymphoma with a year’s worth of chemotherapy. But he was sick and isolated. “The chemo wouldn’t have allowed me to have these moments (I have today),” he says. “The mood, the atmosphere, the interaction, would have been different. I’m very grateful and I’m surprised. I sit around and think, ‘I kind of won the raffle.’ ”

Numerous family celebrations have given the grandchildren time to be integrated in this end of life recognition. And they’ve spent one-on-one quality time with Hitchens. “I want us to get as many positive things out of this as we can,” he says. “It can’t all be sadness and gloom. We need to have some fun.”

For more information about Providence Hospice & Palliative Care services and locations, go to www.ProvidenceHospiceWashington.org.



3432 South Bay Road NE
Olympia, WA 98506

For hospice referrals
t: 800.221.8022 or 360.493.4650
For all other hospice calls
t: 877.620.3286 or 360.493.5900

www.providence.org/pshch

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