

Recognizing Outstanding Service Excellence



Rhea Geelan

(pictured with Geronimo)

Center for Hematologic Malignancies

Bashi Ratterree, on behalf of the staff at the Center for Hematologic Malignancies, submitted the following nomination...

One of our CHM patients had been coming to our clinic for cancer treatment for over 10 years. During the first few years of his care with us, he traveled 5-6 hours by car from Idaho and never missed a visit. He went through a number of different treatments including participating in clinical trials. He lived by himself and had no social support network. He was a true mountain man who preferred the outdoors to human companionship. Eventually, our patient decided to be closer to his providers in our clinic and moved to an Oregon coastal town about 1 hour away. He kept in close contact with us when he needed anything. He always spoke highly of the staff here; trusted our staff; and depended on us for his care. Included in his health care provider team was Rhea Geelan, our triage nurse, who on many occasions spoke to our patient helping to guide him through his home medications and acute illnesses. This past December our patient's disease took a turn for the worse. He was due in clinic for his follow up appointment and when he missed his appointment we knew something was wrong. The local police department was contacted who conducted a well check and eventually sent the patient to the local hospital. From there, the patient was transported to OHSU where he felt more "at home" among familiar faces. The patient arrived very ill to the 12K ICU. The CHM clinical care team, Dr. Spurgeon and Nancy Boyle, met with the patient in partnership with his 12K nurse Jackie to advocate for a dignified care plan in lieu of discharge to a SNF recognizing that this was the end of the road for this patient. He was then transferred to our 14K oncology inpatient unit. In our sadness, our staff remembered the one living being who meant the world to our patient – his four-legged companion, Geronimo. We found out that in our patient's absence, Geronimo was in the care of his neighbor. Rhea recognized that time was very short for this patient and quickly launched Operation Geronimo. Working with the 14K manager, nursing staff and social worker Keren, special permission was obtained to allow a visit to unite this patient and his dog in his final hours. Rhea (who was out on vacation) drove to the patient's neighbor's home on the coast, picked up Geronimo and brought him to the hospital to be with our patient. She, with help from other wonderful staff members here at OHSU, made it possible for our patient to be with the one living being for whom he cared the most before passing away. Rhea not only made that possible but didn't stop there. She stayed at our patient's bedside until the next morning helping him through the dying process. Rhea reassured our patient that she would find a good home for Geronimo, giving the patient peace of mind and comfort. Our patient passed away that day. Rhea's advocacy for our patient was above and beyond the call of duty. Florence Nightingale would have been proud! And, her care and compassion continue as she is currently caring for Geronimo while she finds the best home for someone who has lost his best friend. We are grateful for everything Rhea has done and honor her for her extraordinary efforts.

February 2012

