

Recognizing Outstanding Service Excellence



**Mary Denise Smith, R.N., M.S., C.N.S.
Palliative Medicine and Comfort Care Department**

Maggie Rising from the School of Nursing submitted the following nomination. . .

Mary Denise is with the Palliative and Comfort Care department. On any given day here at OHSU many of us go to great lengths to care for patients and family members. It is less common to recognize and tend to the wounded psyche of a coworker. I want to recognize Mary Denise for putting into practice what she teaches. Recently, as an RN on 7CVA, we had a patient dying of cancer. I cared for him for six 8-hour day shifts before he died. In the process, through therapeutic dialogue and liberal but judicious use of pain medications, I was determined to make him and his wife as physically and emotionally comfortable as I could. Without divulging details, when the process was complete, I felt that I had failed them both. The two other 8-hour shift nurses and I were able to commiserate and console one another to a large degree. But, I did not realize how repressed the true pain of the experience was until Mary Denise came to see me. The afternoon of the patient's death, she walked all the way from the south hospital to 7CVA just to see how I was doing. Mary Denise said softly "I've been meaning to visit you all day to see how you're holding up"? I dismissed her inquiry with a cheerful "fine". Gently, stepping into my exit path, she said, "I know you're doing fine, but how are you feeling"? I once again attempted to flee and said, "okay", as I sought another route of escape. With the bedrock resolve that characterizes Mary Denise, she then replied, "I know you're okay, but what are you feeling right now"? It was at that moment that I felt the distress of that morning welling up into my chest, and I began to cry. Mary Denise then let us both escape to the nurse's station where we talked about what had happened. What amazed me was how she must have known all day that I was suffering. And, even in the face of my own denial, she gently pursued the grief until it would hold still and be dealt with. It was the most incredible nursing intervention I've ever seen, and I am blessed to have been on its receiving end. I am nominating Mary Denise Smith for a Golden Rose Award because she recognized and alleviated the emotional pain that I carried as a result of a patient's painful death even when I was unwilling or unable to do so.



Award Recipient - April 2009