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Timothy Boon

November 23, 2016

Name
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Dear

I was not surprised when the letter came across my desk. It was from Annie, the daughter of a patient we had cared for a few months ago. My telephone conversations with Annie a couple months before had been filled with nothing but disappointment and dissatisfaction.

"I know I was upset when I spoke to you on the phone a couple of months ago and I don't really remember everything I said. I know that I wasn't terribly polite when you called me back a couple of days later. I don't like to think about how I was feeling at that time, but I do remember that I had never felt so incompetent for such an important role in my adult life."

I braced myself:

"The Good Shepherd staff took such great care of my mom!"

The older I get the less I expect any surprises to be welcomed ones. Was I reading this right? Was this the same woman I had spoken to who only months earlier? The woman who had started our first conversation by telling me "Everything is wrong, all wrong."

For the remainder of that call Annie vented what seemed like a never-ending list of the ways our staff had failed her and her mom in just the first five days since her admission. "I don't know what kind of place you think you're running there but it's no good at all," she told me. "Does anyone there have any idea what they're doing?"

My first impulse was to perceive the insult and respond to it with a defense of our fine organization and staff. I wanted to analyze the details of her mom's medical record and find the information to dispute her accusations and reason with her. None of that would have been appropriate, of course, and none of that would have made Annie, or her mom, feel better. The best I could do, with honesty, was to apologize for what I could and empathize with how truly difficult it is to provide care to a loved one at the end of life. Hanging up, I held no confidence that I had alleviated any of her distress.

This is where the amazing staff of Good Shepherd does the work that turns complaints into praise. The compassion, patience and unconditional presence that they consistently offer to our patients and families in all types of situations never ceases to amaze me. Our staff knows that anger can often be a mask for fear, anxiety,

grief and the multitude of emotions that family members face in caring for their loved ones at the end of life. That behind the rage, accusations and threatening, is love and caring, distress and uncertainty.

From reading her mom's medical record I had learned that Annie was an attorney. As I continued to read her letter, I imagined this self-disciplined individual accustomed to preparing herself to do the right thing and to do things well from an early time in her life. I imagined her feeling completely out of her comfort zone as she worked to care for her dying mother. I re-read her words, ***"I had never felt so incompetent for such an important role in my adult life."***

Annie, like many of our patients' loved ones, was just a loving, caring daughter, distressed by her mother's illness. Uncertain of her ability to keep the promises she had made to her mom in her final months of life, she was frightened that she would make, or had already made, a mistake that would cost her mother either time or comfort.

Annie's letter went on to mention a couple of our nurses by name, as well as our home care aide, social worker, spiritual care counselor, and music therapist.

"The hardest thing my sister and I ever did together turned out to be one of the most gratifying experiences of my life. What made this possible is that Good Shepherd's staff helped my sister and me feel better about what we were doing and to talk more openly, without guilt or resentment, about our own limitations. We were able to plan for our mom, ourselves and each other. Your staff guided us and made it okay for us to share our feelings. We found relief from feeling understood rather than judged, by your staff and by each other. Good Shepherd made it possible for us to appreciate the final weeks of mom's life rather than stress over them."

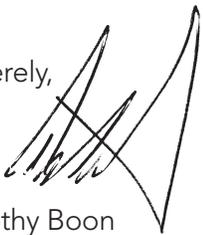
I took a deep breath and a little sigh of relief.

"I know I was a little rough with your staff at first and with you over the phone. I hope you will forgive me that. More than that, I hope you know what a gift your staff was for my mom and me and my sister – each and every one of them."

The work that our staff and volunteers do here at Good Shepherd is often extremely challenging. The work that our patients and their loved ones do, however, is also extraordinary. Our job is to support them and to guide them. In the end, we hope that our work makes their loved ones' dying a little bit easier and a lot less stressful – and sometimes, even gratifying.

We ask you to please take a moment to support Good Shepherd in these efforts. As a community-based organization we consistently rely on the support of our community to support us so that when the time comes, we can support people like Annie - and we can support you and your loved ones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy Boon', with a large, sweeping flourish extending upwards and to the right.

Timothy Boon
President & CEO