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November, 2014

This is the story of two very brave women – Molly and her mother, Alisha. Molly is only 21 years old and she knows she is dying soon. She knows this because she watched her older sister die of the same rare disease. The one that also killed her father.

Alisha moved Molly to Boston to seek the kind of advanced medical treatment for which our area of the country is renowned. Unfortunately for Molly, her disease is too far advanced and her body is simply not strong enough to undergo any further curative treatment. Their family's finances have been completely exhausted by the disease and, while her insurance company has been paying for a tremendous amount of expensive medical care, it does not provide coverage for hospice services.

When Molly's older sister died last year, her mother was by her side in an ICU during her last days and witnessed more suffering than a mother should ever have to watch her child endure. Their family holds very strong religious beliefs and their church community plays a central role in their lives and the decisions they make. Hospice care is discouraged by the church elders who encourage Alisha to have faith and pray for a miracle. Alisha really wants a miracle for her daughter and the last thing she wants to do is create any tensions within her primary support system. But Alisha has been here before with another daughter and she knows both intellectually and viscerally, what is coming. She also knows that no matter what, she will not let Molly suffer the way her older sister did. "If Molly has to die", says Alisha, "I will at least make sure she is as comfortable and peaceful as possible."

As often happens with complex and difficult end-of-life situations, we received the call from the hospital at 4:45pm on a Friday afternoon requesting that we admit Molly to hospice immediately as she was failing fast. Her doctor explained that while hospice care was what Molly and her mother both needed and wanted, her insurance did not cover it. The doctor further explained that it looked like Molly was approaching the very end of her life. A buildup of fluid in her body was causing severe swelling and pain in her legs and making it very difficult for her to breath and her malnutrition was making her too weak to sustain the effort. "Molly's mom just wants her back in her apartment and comfortable during these last few days," explained her doctor. "I'm sorry you won't be getting any payment, but could you please help her?"

For Good Shepherd, answering yes to that question was easy – it is our policy to turn no one away who needs our care – regardless of ability to pay. Getting Molly home and making her comfortable was not so easy. Our staff worked closely with her physician to get Molly out of the hospital and back to the apartment she shared with her mom and younger sister. We assessed her symptoms, got the medical equipment and medications needed to ease both her breathing and her pain and spent that weekend visiting with Molly and her family and preparing for what was thought to be the end of her life.

Two things were clear by the end of that weekend. The first was that Molly felt much more comfortable. The second was that Molly no longer appeared to be actively dying. She was able to talk again and said she felt much better and was even able to walk short distances with a little bit of help.

The first accomplishment, while often much more difficult than it may seem, is what one generally expects from hospice care which focuses on relieving pain and managing symptoms. The second is not always so expected from hospice, but those of us who work in the field can tell you that it happens much more often than many people might think. In fact, studies have shown that people who choose hospice care not only achieve better comfort and quality of life, but also live longer than similarly situated people who do not choose hospice care. Perhaps, if that fact was better known, Alisha would not have to hide the fact that Molly is receiving hospice care from her primary support system - the loving members of her church.

As I write this letter, that weekend was a month and a half ago. Molly is still with us and, while her condition remains terminal, she is having some good days. She has been able to go from simply preparing for her own death to experiencing some enjoyment in the life she has remaining. Although she can no longer make a trip outside her apartment, her doctor and staff from the doctor's office come to visit her and work closely with our staff to ensure the best quality of life for Molly. And as her difficulty breathing has abated, she has been able to talk more and process some of the grief she has about the loss of her older sister who died just six months ago. Our counseling staff is helping her sort through all of those feelings that are so intertwined with the impending loss of her own life.

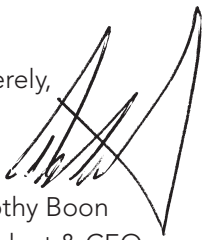
Though her life will still be heartbreakingly brief, the extra time that Alisha has had with her daughter has helped calm any uneasiness she felt about choosing hospice care for Molly. Molly's final months will most likely be a comfort, rather than a regret for her mother. This extra time may just be the miracle for which Alisha had been praying.

At Good Shepherd Community Care it is our great honor to serve some purpose in the lives of all of our patients and families. We are extremely grateful to all of you who make that possible through your support of our organization.

This past year has been challenging for us from a financial perspective. Our costs continue to rise as the reimbursement we receive for our care is actually declining. We expect our environment to get even more challenging over the next few years. More than ever, our ability to say YES to patients like Molly is dependent upon you saying YES to our request for support.

Please give what you can to our annual appeal this year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Timothy Boon', written in a cursive style.

Timothy Boon
President & CEO