

BULLETIN

Expert care with a big heart

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rowing old, losing our health, needing care, and facing death ... these end-of-life passages await us all. We all fear to be seen as a burden and hope to be treated with compassion and dignity. Luckily for many elders and their families, compassion and respect for dignity are abundant in Gwen DeRosas skilled care.

Gwen DeRosa Registered Psychiatric Nurse Chief Steward Kiro Manor
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DeRosa is a psychiatric nurse at Kiro Manor, a long-term care facility for seniors in Trail. It is a privilege to get to know and care for the residents there, she says, and a pleasure to be part of a team of professionals who share her level of commitment.

-Every day I know weve worked really hard to make [the facility] as much of a home as possible. We make sure we give the residents the best care possible, and that they have the best life they can, and when dying they have people who care about them," DeRosa said.

Kiro Manor provides a home for as many as 85 residents.

-Its for any senior who needs help. They may have Alzheimers, or because of physical inabilities can no longer look after themselves at home."

A typical day for DeRosa includes administering medication, carrying out assessments of the residents mental and physical status, providing a wide range of physical care from dressings to catheter changes, charting and chart auditing, care conferences with residents and their families, liaising with doctors, pharmacists, other colleagues and the hospital, admissions, staff meetings and education, and a myriad of other duties.

One part of DeRosas work that she finds particularly rewarding is palliative care.

-If possible, we keep our people here rather than have them go to the hospital. So theres a lot of supporting people and their families and helping them deal with grief," DeRosa said.

When she first was called upon to do palliative care, she wondered how she could handle the emotions involved.

-But in the end it became an honour to be with someone when they are dying ... to give them comfort and be

there for them in such an important part of their life at the end. Of course, it is sad. We do cry. But everyone is there together and we support each other. And you know you've given to them," she said.

DeRosa had no idea she'd love her work. When she applied at Kiro Manor, her motivation was simple: she needed a job. Her training as a psychiatric nurse at BCIT gave her experience in providing acute care in hospital settings, and she had no particular interest in long-term care. But she needed more income to supplement her on-call position at the Kootenay Boundary Hospital psychiatric unit.

"It was a financial decision," explains DeRosa. "I didn't know if I would enjoy it or not. But I found that it kind of became part of me. I grew to love it and to care about the people ... not just the ones I look after, but also those I work with."

It's been 14 years since that fortuitous choice, and DeRosa still loves her work.

"I work with a great group of people and have learned a lot from them. I'm always learning, which is a great thing about this job. I've grown a lot as a nurse and as a person. I've learned to be more empathetic. I feel good about my ability to look after people's physical and mental needs," DeRosa said.

Her developing passion for working with seniors spurred her to go back to school a few years ago. She completed an 18-month gerontology program through Selkirk College.

"That has been a really exciting and a wonderful opportunity," DeRosa said.


Another opportunity DeRosa took up with enthusiasm has been involvement in HSA. She has been Chief Steward for her site since the late 1990s.

"I really like being a steward. There have been some interesting grievances, and I've learned a lot," DeRosa said. She has seen first hand that the union can not only make a difference in the workplace, but can also have political influence.

"This year I've done work with the MLA liaison. We met with Colin Hansen ... who was the health minister ... to broach our unions concerns. I think he listened pretty well. Overall it did help make some changes; for instance, we got forgiveness of some student loans for some HSA professions.

"HSA is a great union with lots of opportunities for learning. I hope to continue being steward as long as people keep wanting me," she said.

The future will bring change for DeRosa because Kiro Manor will be closing. She is confident she has enough seniority to be assured of a job at a similar facility in the region, where, she hopes, she will work with some of her current colleagues.

She very emphatically wants to continue to do what she has been doing. DeRosa knows that as long as she's in a seniors long-term care facility she's in the right place: loving her job, enjoying her peers, and bringing compassion and dignity to everyone in her care." 

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