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Hospice partners with Conestoga College on palliative care programs

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By [Johanna Weidner](#)

KITCHENER — Lisaard House has partnered with Conestoga College to create specialized training programs in palliative care as it prepares to open a new residential hospice in Kitchener this summer.

Innisfree House will have 10 beds to care for end-of-life patients, nearly doubling the total number in Waterloo Region. Lisaard House in Cambridge, a six-bed residential hospice for cancer patients, is funded through donations and partial government funding.

But finding nurses and personal support workers with expertise in palliative care proved difficult, prompting Lisaard House to approach Conestoga over a year ago to develop a program to give new staff the essential knowledge.

"We know what we want them to know," said Connie Dwyer, executive director of Lisaard House.

After hospice staff is trained, Conestoga plans to make the programs available to nurse and personal support workers across the region through its continuing education.

The two certificate programs created by an expert in palliative care and nursing and supported by funding from the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network, include practical training.

"It will give them a really good background before they start," Dwyer said. "When we open, staff that we have on board will be as well trained as staff we have now."

Some staff at Lisaard House will move to Innisfree, now under construction on Homer Watson Boulevard on land leased from Conestoga College. It will be open to people with any terminal illness. All care will be provided for free, just like at Lisaard.

Pain management and psychosocial issues are two key areas in palliative care, and not covered in much depth in regular training.

When people come to Lisaard House, Dwyer explained, "we're looking at making sure they're comfortable."

And caregivers also need to be able to handle psychosocial issues that emerge, not just with patients but also their families.

"What are the people going through at the same time," Dwyer said. "What do we say to their loved one when they're sitting there dying?"

While Dwyer is pleased hospice staff will get the specialized training, she is also happy it will be offered to professionals in the community. Palliative care is not exclusive to a hospice, but rather more common in hospitals and long-term care facilities.

"We need to get that education out there," Dwyer said. "So no matter what setting you're in, you're getting the best in palliative care."

Conestoga hopes to open the programs in January.

"(Registered nurses) are prepared as generalists," said Don Wildfong, chair of continuing education at Conestoga.

But, he added, they're also lifelong learners and that's where continuing education comes in. Conestoga saw a need in the community to provide specialized training in palliative care, which Wildfong said is not now optimal across the continuum of care.

"It's all about improving our value to the workplace on topics that are really important to quality of care," said Marlene Raasok, executive dean of the School of Health and Life Sciences and Community Services.

Raasok is excited about the partnership, which she hopes will continue to expand to boost Conestoga's curriculum as well as the workforce.

Included in Innisfree house is a suite for training that will be available to Conestoga students and community caregivers to get hands-on experience in a realistic hospice care setting.

Dwyer said the hospice is also eager to bolster its partnership with the college and explore further education opportunities, "making sure our future caregivers have the knowledge to carry on the work we're doing."

Innisfree House is expected to open by early or mid-July. The [fundraising campaign](#) has achieved about 85 per cent of its \$4.4-million goal.

Lisaard House is hosting its annual fundraiser Hike for Lisaard House on May 23. Find out more at hikeforlisaardhouse.com.

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