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Conestoga College, Lisaard House team up for palliative care programs

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By [Lisa Rutledge](#)

CAMBRIDGE – The only thing more heartbreaking than watching people live out their last days at Lisaard House is the realization that there aren't enough beds for everyone in need of palliative care.

It's a statement that saddens workers at the Cambridge hospice residence, which provides the region's only cancer hospice care. It's also a situation Lisaard House staff is hoping to see change as the organization gears up to open a second residence, Innisfree House, a 10-bed hospice under construction in Kitchener.

"For the 140 people we care for every year, we turn away as many or more because we don't have enough beds," explained Janet Willard, development co-ordinator at Lisaard. "It's quite a shocking statistic."

That demand is only going to increase as the population grows and ages, she said.

"The reason we're building Innisfree House is because there is already a great need."

Rising to meet that challenge is going to take more than bricks and mortar, however, maintains Lisaard's executive director Connie Dwyer. To keep up with the growing need, while maintaining the level of care offered at the Cambridge hospice, more health care providers will need to be trained in the complex and compassionate art of end-of-life care.

The executive staff at the hospice has come up with their own solutions to fill that need. The organization is working with Conestoga College to develop two new palliative care certificate pilot programs to provide specific training in end-of-life care similar to the levels of care expected at Lisaard.

"Lisaard House has a reputation for providing excellent care and we want that to go through to Innisfree also," said Dwyer. "As we're hiring new staff, we want to make sure they have the best education going forward."

Lisaard executives describe the new certificate programs as a blending of palliative care, research and teaching activities to improve the level of end-of-life caregiving for the next generation of front-line staff.

The pilot programs, developed for registered nurses and personal support workers, are the culmination of a partnership between Lisaard House and Conestoga College that has been in the works for more than a year.

The programs will essentially provide in-depth education on pain medication and pain management, explained Dwyer. But they'll also teach the sensitive aspects of caregiving.

“It’s also the emotional support, how can we support our families,” she said. “We want these staff to be comfortable when they’re to be in a room with someone who is dying, to be able to support the person as well as their families.”

It’s estimated that once the Innisfree is open, the two hospices will be able to care for more than 400 people each year.

A capital fundraising campaign is still ongoing, 85 per cent of the way to raising the \$4.4 million project cost.

A fundraiser for Innisfree is set for the Saturday, May 23 at the Conestoga College’s Doon campus to close the gap to the campaign’s goal. Last year, the hike raised \$42,000.

For more information about the event, visit www.lisaardhouse.com/hikeforhospice.