This report on the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Association’s 2017 activity comes to you just as NHPCA is closing in on 35 years of service to Nebraska hospice and palliative care providers. For 35 years, a statewide organization has united Nebraska nurses, physicians, social workers, chaplains, volunteers, administrators, educators, and so many others in their quest to help Nebraskans at the end of their lives.

As your NHPCA team was going through archives, we found notes from a meeting held in 1980 to discuss the creation of a statewide organization. The notes of Dr. Tom Perkins indicate that the group decided the following should be addressed by a state association: public and professional education, standards, the definition of hospice care, the development of a hospice referral and information system, provider reimbursement, research, how membership should be determined, and forms of political action. While adjusting to meet members’ needs based on changes in society, the regulatory and reimbursement environment, and technology, NHPCA still proudly advocates on behalf of members just as those early meeting notes propose.

This report provides a glimpse of this important work in 2017. Each day, the NHPCA team aims to support Nebraska’s hospice and palliative care providers with stewardship in mind, through high-quality work, with integrity, and with great professionalism.
In 2017, NHPCA members made two trips to Washington, D.C., to advocate on behalf of Nebraska’s hospice and palliative care providers.

In 2017, former NHPCA Chair Linda Rock of Scottsbluff received the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s Galen Miller Leadership Award “for her professional leadership in the field and her dedication to advancing hospice and palliative care.”

In May, the NHPCA team and members met with U.S. Senator Deb Fischer and other members of Congress from Nebraska.

As part of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s July 2017 Advocacy Intensive, NHPCA members and staff met with Nebraska’s members of Congress.

Nebraska is well-represented at the national level in other ways, too. In 2017, NHPCA’s Jennifer Eurek served on the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s Council of States Steering Committee. In addition, members Tim Snyder of Hillcrest Hospice served on NHPCO’s Professional Education Committee and Carla Thompson of Hospice of Siouxland and member Marcia Cederdahl served on NHPCO’s Quality and Standards Committee.

At the federal level, NHPCA followed the progress of the Rural Access to Hospice Act, which would address barriers restricting patients’ primary care physicians from serving as their attending physician when they elect hospice care, and the Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act of 2017, which would allow physician assistants to serve as the attending physician.

Also, at the federal level, NHPCA kept members informed of regulatory and reimbursement issues affecting them. These included payment; emergency preparedness; the August launch of Hospice Compare, a consumer resource; and HEART, a new data collection and patient assessment tool.

At the state level, NHPCA monitored several Nebraska legislative bills, including those related to palliative care, aid in dying, and perinatal hospice care. The proposed aid in dying bill did not pass in 2017; but both LB506, which required DHHS to establish a perinatal hospice website, and LB323, which required DHHS to establish a palliative care website and advisory council, passed. Later in 2017, NHPCA was appointed to serve on this Council by Governor Ricketts.
In 2017, NHPCA released its fourth Nebraska End-of-Life Survey Report. The survey and report were made possible by a grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield Fund for Quality and Efficient Health Care Donor Advised Fund of Nebraska Community Foundation. The report shares the results of a random survey conducted across Nebraska households to gauge perceptions of a range of end-of-life issues, including wishes, pain, fear, advance planning, and knowledge of hospice and palliative care. The 2017 report contains graphs and tables and compares data with the 2003, 2006 and 2011 reports to show trends and changes in perceptions. The report and its supporting tools, including PowerPoint slides and one-sheeters for consumers and physicians, are available to NHPCA members in their education efforts.

On Sept. 19, a press conference was held at Pinnacle Bank Arena in Lincoln to announce the release of the 2017 Nebraska End-of-Life Survey Report. Senator Mark Kolterman spoke at the press conference, along with NHPCA Board Chair Gary George and NHPCA team members.

NHPCA conducted 14 workshops at nine locations throughout Nebraska for hospice and palliative care professionals. Three of these education opportunities were web-based. Topics included advocacy, emergency preparedness, veterans, and regulations. In addition, conference calls were held for social workers, chaplains, and volunteer coordinators three times in 2017.

In March, NHPCA held its annual, two-day “Living a Good Life…at the End of Life” Conference for 250 professionals who care for patients and families with chronic or terminal illness. Nationally-known speakers included Dr. James Avery, one of the “50 Most Influential Physician Executives,” and Judi Lund Person, Vice President of Regulatory and Compliance for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Five members received scholarships to attend NHPCA’s 2017 “Living a Good Life…at the End of Life” Conference: Lydia Bockus, CHI Health at Home – Omaha; Jennifer Clark, Methodist Home Health and Hospice; Lani Glaser, Tabitha Hospice – Lincoln; Jean McKechnie, VNA Hospice; and Jenni Smith, AseraCare Hospice – Lincoln. The scholarships are funded by the Galen Miller Memorial Education Fund and proceeds from the conference raffle.

The Nebraska Hospice-Veteran Partnership, a collaboration with the Department of Veteran Affairs, works to ensure Nebraska’s veterans near the end of life receive the best care possible. NHPCA held three Nebraska Hospice-Veteran Partnership meetings in 2017. Eighty percent of Nebraska hospices also participated in the We Honor Veterans national campaign, which is designed to empower hospice professionals to meet the unique needs of dying veterans. Hospice agencies across the state recognized dying veterans through special pinning recognition. Last year, more than 1,000 pins – twice as many as 2016 – were obtained through the Hospice-Veteran Partnership for use in these poignant ceremonies.
The recipients of the Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Association annual awards were recognized at the 2017 “Living a Good Life...at the End of Life” Conference in Lincoln. In addition to the awards below, more than 20 Outstanding Hospice Volunteer Awards were presented to individuals from across the state for their exemplary service.

Governor Pete Ricketts proclaimed November 2017 as Hospice and Palliative Care Month in Nebraska.

NHPCA provided educational hospice resources for patients and families through the “Hospice lets me be...” outreach campaign. The campaign focuses on real-life stories to promote hospice benefits, awareness, and connect people with resources. NHPCA distributed educational worksheets, videos, stories, and other outreach materials to member hospices across the state. Materials were updated in 2017 to incorporate data from the new Nebraska End-of-Life Survey Report.

Note: 2017 Nebraska End-of-Life Survey expenses were incurred in 2017, while the project’s revenue arrived in 2016.
Thank You
The Nebraska Hospice and Palliative Care Association thanks the following individuals and organizations for their generous support in 2017.

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Nancy Peter, Betty Wilberger, Joe McLaugin, Corey Peter, and Ben Peter, in memory of their sister, aunt and great aunt
Randal Petersen, in memory of Agnes Petersen
Norman and Corine Simon
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Raymond and Marilyn Trumble
Robert Way
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Mao Pham
Deau Trayer
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Bob Throop, in memory of Byrdie

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