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SDDVA and Avera Partner to Enhance Veterans' End-of-Life Care

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and Avera have partnered to build a consortium of veteran volunteers to ensure that excellent care at the end of life is available for our veterans.

Avera@Home Hospice began a partnership with the We Honor Veterans program three years ago. The programs goals, while straightforward, require a collaboration between hospice professionals and leaders in veterans care. As Avera continues collaboration with the Department and partners, they will build a coalition of volunteers to provide veteran-to-veteran service.

“Veteran volunteers can share their training, history and common language,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “Veterans never take off their uniforms, even when they retire or complete active service. Their core values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage are rooted in who they are.”

Avera Hospice teams provide care in veterans' homes, long-term care facilities and rural hospitals.

“Whenever a physician recommends hospice care, we are there as a team to provide it,” said Megan Enfield, lead social worker with Avera@Home. “When we provide it for a veteran, we now know how to make the experience more personal and relevant to their specific needs, as well as the needs of their families.”

Whitlock said veterans have unique needs based on when and with which branch they served.

“When we can acknowledge their rank, and the facts about their enlistment and experiences, including those in combat or that led to injuries, we can make veterans realize we honor them,” he said “Veterans are more apt to open their doors and share their stories when we recognize their service. We can join them, as comrades, in remembrance as well as in celebration of accomplishments.”

Whitlock said the voluntary commitment that Avera's care teams have made by incorporating the We Honor Veterans program in their hospice services is noteworthy.

“We appreciate Avera's commitment to our heroes and look forward to this partnership,” said Whitlock. “In January, our Department, Avera and Hughes County Veterans Service Office will host an information-sharing event, and we have invited over 40 veterans to join us so they might learn about this great volunteering opportunity.”

You can learn more about the program at Avera.org.