Willow Award

EXCELLENCE IN END-OF-LIFE CARE

06/11/2024

John L. McClellan Memorial Veterans Hospital – Hospice Unit (6th Floor)

This letter has been coming for some time, but it has taken a while for me to get to the point that I could really think about it, let alone write about it. October 11th, 2023, I lost my stepmom after she fought a long, extremely hard battle due to complications from surgery. A mere three weeks later, on November 6th, I lost my daddy, David Johnson, to cancer.

As tough as this time has been on my family, I can't thank the nurses, doctors, and staff on the VA hospice unit enough for all their hard work, kindness, dedication, and loving manner during one of the most difficult times I have ever had to face. There were moments that I was hurting and trying to sort through the heartbreak, and not the easiest person to deal with, but the VA Hospice nurses and doctors walked, talked, and literally held me through it all.

When daddy was passing, I thought I knew what to expect since I had just been through a similar experience, but everyone's end of life journey is not the same. I immediately had my defenses up after the last go around, and I was extremely exhausted and empty from 5 months of caregiving. There were times when they would have been well within their rights to tell me to go kick rocks, but they didn't. They understood the trauma and heartbreak I was enduring, and they loved me through it. Not only did they love me through it, but they also loved my daddy through it as well; and he was not the easiest man to take care of. They made sure he was comfortable, out of pain, and had every dignity a veteran deserves. Turning him, cleaning him, feeding him, treating him, making sure he had everything he needed; enduring the insults, helping him feel special, making sure he knew he was important, and never forgotten. They kept him warm, cooled him off, kept me warm, cooled me off. They made sure I had a comfortable place to sleep, plenty of pillows, made sure I had coffee, something to eat, an ear and expertise for every little concern, as well as the big ones. I never had to wait longer than a few minutes if I hit the call light or stepped into the hallway. Not only did they help me navigate daddy's end of life journey, but they were also there for me even after he had been called home.

Laurie, Angel, and all of you other ladies (and sirs) …I wish that I could nominate each one of you individually. Hospice care is not just nursing. It is a calling, a ministry. Every family's, and every veteran's life, that comes onto that floor, has been touched by you. The grace and dignity you afford these veterans, these heroes, who have sacrificed so much for our country, is nothing short of beautifully amazing. Our hearts are grieving and at times grasping for understanding, but you honor our wishes and understand our grief, by loving our veterans on to their eternal home.

As amazing as you were for my daddy, I also believe you need special recognition for the veterans that do not have family or loved ones that can be present for their veteran's life's last chapter. The unwavering compassion, companionship, and special care that your team gives our heroes, so that they do not die alone, is commendable, incredible, and special. I hope every person in this room gives you a standing ovation when the time comes to give you this award. Not only do you deserve it, but you have also earned it.

With all my heart, my gratitude, appreciation, and respect...THANK YOU!!!

Chrissy Matthews

Daughter of David Johnson (7/2/1957 – 11/6/2023)