

How Your Support Makes a Difference

Below is a story written by the sister of a patient; Sharron is keen to share Dennis' story so that others won't feel the same fear or apprehension she felt knowing a loved one was coming under the care of the Hospice.

There are a few things that are worth keeping in mind as you read about Dennis and Sharron's experience of St Francis Hospice Dublin:

1. Providing specialist palliative care, which brings comfort, dignity and holistic person-centred care to people who are faced with a life-limiting illness, is a privilege; while many see palliative care linked with death, it is about much more than that.
2. Palliative care can improve the quality of life for patients with life-limiting illnesses. We have often heard family members say that their loved ones 'got a new lease of life' when they become involved with St Francis Hospice. And this isn't by chance, it is due to the care and consideration that goes into everything to do with a specialist palliative care service.
3. Patients being able to take part in meaningful activities like baking, painting or simply being able to sit out of bed to enjoy a view of the garden after a long hospital stay is an important part of the care we provide. It promotes wellbeing and that all important quality of life aspect that is so crucial to palliative care. This is supported by our Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Social Work and Complementary Therapy teams and more across the Hospice.

Dennis and Sharron's Story

On July 3rd 2019, I sat with my brother Dennis as he was told the awful news that he had terminal cancer. The devastation, the sheer devastation, of this was multiplied when we were told he had only a few weeks left to live.

Plans were made for Dennis to go to St Francis Hospice in Blanchardstown and on the 8th July, myself, my sister and Dennis made the journey there. Conversation was minimal and light on the way. I didn't know what to expect when we got to the hospice. I had looked it up and the place looked nice but, for me, there was just a sense of dread and fear. This was to be the last place that my brother would live.

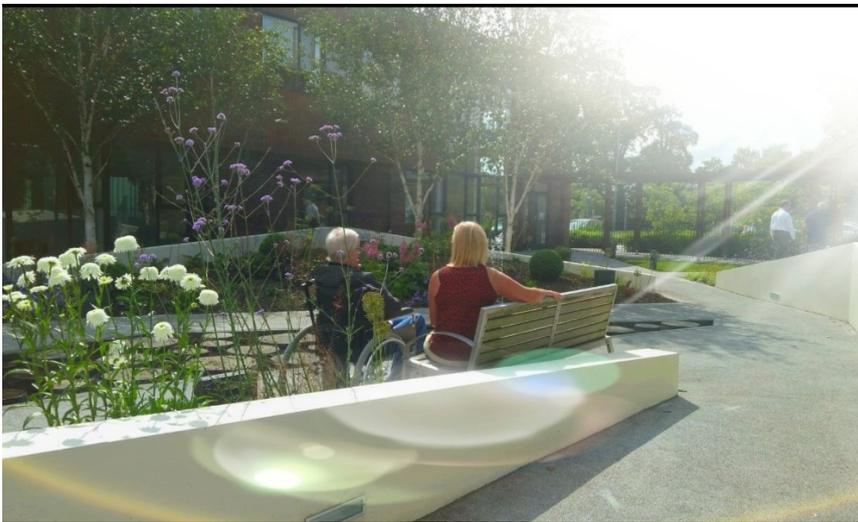
On arrival to the hospice I was taken aback by everything. From the garden areas on each side of the entrance, to the beautiful, big bright reception area. The high ceilinged corridors were bright and airy with enough room for us to walk beside Dennis, not behind or in front of him. Dennis needed the use of a wheelchair at times and the lift was big enough for him to turn himself around and, as Dennis joked, he wasn't left looking at the wall until the doors opened.

When we got to Dennis's room it was very emotional, for a number of reasons. Dennis wheeled himself in and around the room, the bathroom was big enough to fit his wheelchair in and close the door himself without needing assistance. This was particularly important for Dennis as he didn't like to ask for help, he would still have his independence and his dignity.

The room had everything he needed, including an intercom to call out if he needed assistance with anything. There was also a call button attached to the bed and we all had a good laugh when he pressed this and a nurse arrived in minutes to see what he needed. Dennis couldn't apologise enough saying that he didn't know what it was for. And then there was the sofa for family/visitors to relax on. It was a lovely self-contained apartment really!!



There was even a balcony which overlooked the garden. Dennis said that he loved sitting there at night because it was lovely when all the lights came on in the garden. The garden has benches dotted all around it and it became one of Dennis's favourite places to sit. He loved sitting near the water feature saying it was so peaceful listening to the sound of the water from the little fountains in it. Dennis and I had many quiet moments, many long, heartfelt conversations and many lovely afternoons out there listening to his favourite Bob Marley music.



As I said at the beginning, on thinking about Dennis going to the hospice, I had a sense of dread and fear as this was to be the last place that my brother would live. As it turned out it was very overwhelming, for a number of reasons. I find it hard to put into words but on entering the Hospice, the surroundings, the big bright reception area, the wide corridors and spacious en-suite rooms. The support Dennis received and the support we as his family received. I don't know what I imagined but it certainly wasn't this.

There was life in it, life in the colours, the décor. I felt as though I had been holding my breath since we got the awful diagnosis and now I could breathe, there was room to breathe there, I knew my brother would receive the best care possible.

And for Dennis, Dennis said that he felt like he was in a five star hotel, he was overwhelmed by the fact that he had his own room, his own privacy, his own balcony!! He was amazed that he could push the call button and someone was with him within minutes. He often remarked that the staff who worked there were always so nice, that nothing was too much for them, they were always in good humour and always ready to help.

I told my brother that this was no more than he deserved, no more than anyone deserves.

To all of the staff in St Francis Hospice, to all of those who fundraise and those of you who provide funding to keep this amazing facility doing what it does, thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart, because of you, the last place my brother lived, for nearly five weeks was, in Dennis's words, a five star hotel. He was given a taste of heaven and I truly believe it helped him on his final journey.

Thank you so much.

Sharron