

## **Elzbieta Tyliszczak, palliative care nurse**

Elzbieta Tyliszczak was trained as a labor and delivery nurse in her native Poland; when she moved to Canada 15 years ago, Tyliszczak underwent an eight-month course and wrote a provincial exam to enter the profession here.

Tyliszczak found work as a visiting nurse, and although it was a vastly different experience than that from her labor and delivery years, “I rediscovered myself through the case load I was carrying,” she explains.

“I did a lot of palliative care, and I kind of moved myself more and more into it. I found myself very passionate about it – palliative care is such a special field.

“You’re not only providing pain and symptom management, you’re also ensuring that the patient has a good quality of life, remaining life. You’re not curing these people... you’re ensuring a peaceful end of life.”

For Tyliszczak, life as a palliative care nurse has required her to seek out resources for support, both professionally and personally. Caring for clients nearing death can take its toll on any nurse, no matter how experienced, and Tyliszczak works every day to maintain the balance between sensitivity and strength.

“This can be very challenging,” she admits. “It affects you. You remember clients who are very young. You deal with people who understand that sometimes there is no cure, there is no hope. Sometimes it can really hurt.

“But you have to remember you’re a nurse. You’re there for the client. You have to ensure that you can control their symptoms, that you can’t break down because they need you. You never, ever forget to provide the best comfort measures and the best care possible.”

As a palliative care nurse, Tyliszczak not only works with the patient directly, but also with the friends and family members, many of whom struggle as much as the patient. She utilizes all of her training and background to guide family members, helping them cope with their own pain, and allowing them the education to provide their own care while she isn’t present.

“It can be very difficult to be just one person who does all the care,” says Tyliszczak. “That’s why you bring in a team, so you aren’t overwhelmed, and so that you have a strategy. There are palliative physicians, occupational therapists, personal support workers, palliative research nurses...

“You’re never alone.”

Tyliszczak urges nurses considering a specialty in palliative care to ask questions, to be open to collaboration, and to look forward to learning something new every day.

“No matter how experienced you are, no matter how much school you’ve attended, you learn something new every day. You learn something new from every patient. And you can take all that knowledge and know you can provide even better care than you ever thought possible.”