



2010 TENET HEROES HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE



Grace Heffron, RN
Houston Northwest Medical Center
Registered Nurse, 1977

Grace is the person others turn to for guidance when faced with life-and-death decisions. Caregiving is in Grace's genes: Her father and four uncles were doctors, and her mother and three aunts were nurses.

For nearly 20 years, Grace has co-chaired the hospital's bioethics committee. Grace knows how complicated it can be for family members who are faced with the impending loss of a loved one.

One patient who was near death wanted to see her dog, so Grace brought it to the hospital. Grace helped another family make plans to take a deceased family member back to his home country. She organized a wedding for a patient in the intensive care unit. Grace spent hours one weekend helping a family deal with the diagnosis that their young son was brain-dead. She has come in on her days off and in the middle of the night to help family members understand that the decision to allow a loved one to die may be in the best interest of the patient.

Grace frequently counsels patients and family members about the benefits of organ donation and serves as the liaison to LifeGift, the local organ donation organization. She helped start the hospital's organ donation program and continues to play a vital role in educating nursing staff and physicians about the issue.

To help educate the community about end-of-life issues, Grace helped organize "Labor of Love: End of Life Forum" in conjunction with a local college. The event, which covers topics like choosing hospice care and making funeral arrangements, was so successful that it will be held annually.

Though she's been at the hospital for more than three decades, Grace has no plans to retire. Her love of caring for patients, interacting with families and teaching staff about end-of-life issues is just too strong.

Nurses who work at Houston Northwest Medical Center know they have a mentor, leader and friend in Grace. A colleague said, "Whatever she is engaged in, she does it with every ounce of energy in her body. She never does anything halfway." Another said, "To know her is to love her. She always wants patients to know that they are getting the best care from compassionate nurses."