

Hospice of North Central Ohio to launch virtual reality therapy



HNCO Bereavement Coordinator Kailey Bradley-Thomas experiments with virtual reality goggles which she hopes to incorporate into her grief counseling. A grant from the Ashland County Community Foundation is allowing for the establishment of a virtual reality therapy program for the families served by Hospice of North Central Ohio. - Submitted photo

Hospice of North Central Ohio will be one of a handful of hospices in the country to use virtual reality therapy to grant dying patients their last wishes, **thanks to a \$5,960 grant from the Ashland County Community Foundation.**

VRT uses video technology to generate realistic 360-degree, photographic or animated three-dimensional images, accompanied by sounds from the actual environment. When donning the headset and headphones, the viewer is surrounded by visuals and sounds that give the impression of being physically present in the environment. Virtual reality therapy treatment allows patients to relive memories, return to places of emotional significance, or experience something or somewhere that they desire.

“It’s a virtual bucket list,” explains Ben Roby, HNCO chaplain and point person for the program, in a news release. “There is limited data about the efficacy of virtual reality as therapy, so when Ralph Tomassi, chief development officer, shared the vision after reading about its use in the UK, our staff fully embraced the idea.

“In my research, I have found that the few hospices currently implementing this therapy in the U.S. are providing a rudimentary experience,” Roby added. “With this equipment, our patients will enjoy a more realistic adventure.”

Bill Kahl, HNCO executive director, said in the release: “This grant allows us to offer this unique experience free of charge to Ashland County patients nearing the end of their lives. As the program is fine-tuned, we will pursue additional funding to extend the program into our other service areas.”

Following beta testing this winter, HNCO hopes to launch the program officially in early 2019, adding one more way Hospice of North Central Ohio can nurture a positive end-of-life experience.

“Because we deliver care at home and in nursing facilities, the portability of these virtual reality goggles is perfect to give each patient the opportunity to enjoy a special activity or place,” added Roby.

Jim Cutright, Ashland County Community Foundation executive director, stated: “We consider it a privilege to partner with HNCO on this opportunity to provide meaningful end-of-life care for those in our community who may benefit from such cutting-edge technology.”

Hospice of North Central Ohio’s staff and volunteers are excited to help their patients get to the beach, mountains, their childhood home, or travel to the other side of the globe through this innovative therapy.

Headquartered at 1050 Dauch Drive in Ashland, Hospice of North Central Ohio serves more than 200 patients daily in Ashland, Crawford, Huron, Knox, Morrow and Richland counties with palliative and hospice services. Additionally, free bereavement services are provided for hundreds of families of hospice patients and anyone in the community experiencing grief. Call 800-952-2207 for more information. HNCO is a community partner of United Way.

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