

Dr. Gerry Farrell



Dr. Gerry Farrell recalls the day he decided to further explore the realm of palliative care. Twenty years into a busy family practice, he was working one night, performing one of the 1200 deliveries to his name and delivered a beautiful baby girl. He then walked down the hall towards the room of his dying patient and realized that while he had brought so many into this world, he knew little about caring for those who were departing. Although he had taken care of the

dying on many occasions, he felt the need to set forth in learning more about adequately helping his dying patients through their end-of-life course. His journey turned into two decades of dedication to the dying people of Pictou County, Nova Scotia, where he has lived and worked since 1981.

Gerry sought training through Larry Librach, who became one of his heroes. He also worked at Saint Christopher's Hospice in London where he met palliative care legend, Dame Cecily Saunders and spent some time in hospices in Wales. He returned to Pictou where he became involved in the development of a model for community palliative care, ultimately forming Pictou's very first palliative care program. In 2000, the first integrated Palliative Care team of Pictou County was formed and some of its original members are still there today. The program has grown into one of full service, integrating hospital and community care. The turning point was the creation of a six bed Palliative Care Unit at Pictou's Aberdeen Hospital, which opened in 2006. Dr. Farrell envisioned the transformation of a hospital storage space into what is now a captivating, peaceful place for patients and their families to stay and visit. The unit was entirely funded by the community's donations, thanks to fundraising by Dr. Farrell and his team and the support of the Pictou County Health Authority. In addition to hand-made quilts for each private bedroom, one of the personal touches of the unit is Dr. Farrell's photographs of flowers and butterflies mounted onto glass windows in the corridors. His passion for photography and gardening complement well his tender nature and caring soul.

Palliative care became a passion of Dr. Farrell's and after 10 years of working in the field, he transitioned from part time to full time, becoming Medical Director of the palliative care program. He mentions the utter privilege and the rewarding feeling of working in palliative care, just by being able to witness the end-of-life journey of his patients. One of the biggest things he has learned over the years, he says, is to be a

good listener, to listen to patients' stories and allow them the opportunity to express their feelings. Working in palliative care, he feels, has been the icing on the cake from all his years of practice in medicine, "a new lease on life". He is now on the verge of retiring and plans to spend his time pursuing photography, gardening, reading the likes of Atul Gawande and travelling with his camera in tow. His wife, Vivian, to whom he has been married for forty-four years, will be by his side. While originally from Marystown, Newfoundland, they plan on staying in Pictou County, which Dr. Farrell calls his home.



© photograph by Dr. Gerry Farrell in Marie Joseph, Guysborough County, Nova Scotia

Dr. Farrell, humbled by his nomination as a CSPCP local palliative care hero, illustrated clearly to me, the modest nature of his character. It was his enthusiasm and fighting dedication, which lead to the development of seamless palliative care services and a custom-made Palliative Care Unit in Pictou County, Nova Scotia. He was rightfully honored by Cancer Care Nova Scotia with their Innovation Excellence Award in 2010. One of his colleagues describes him as "a tremendous example of the best of what palliative care has to provide", and "a kind gentle man with great wisdom who has been loved by all."

For a true testimonial of a palliative care experience at the Pictou Palliative Care Unit, follow this link: <http://aberdeenhealthfoundation.com/palliative-care-unit-endowment/>.

Dr. Sanea Abboud