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Health Care Wrapped in Prayer



Dorothy Mayernik, R.N., M.S.N., manager of the Mercy Parish Nurse and Health Ministry Program, surprised Nancy with a handmade prayer shawl on a recent home visit.

Combining professional nursing and ministry, parish nurses provide practical medical support and spiritual care to people in their homes, at neighborhood senior centers or after church services.

“It’s the only nursing specialty I know where you can develop long-term relationships with patients because you see them in everyday life,” said Dorothy Mayernik, R.N., M.S.N.

“Parishioners feel free to approach the parish nurse with their concerns.”

Nancy, one of the first parish nurses in the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System program, has been on both sides of parish nursing. When she could no longer work as a nurse in a county HIV clinic, she became a parish nurse, making home visits to people in St. Rita Parish in Munhall, Pa. Now, she receives home visits from a parish nurse.

“As my own complex health problems set in, I’ve become the one who needs help,” said Nancy. *“When Dorothy visited me recently, she brought me a hand-crocheted prayer shawl. Immediately, I thought of my friend Carol who had died just 10 days earlier. Dorothy listened to me talk about Carol and her love of crocheting. It became a bereavement visit, helping me to cope with the loss of a good friend.”*

Parish nurses listen and educate people about how to stay well. They find medical care for uninsured people; they lend emotional support and help solve everyday health care problems. They also pray with people, knowing that God is the source of all healing.

Mercy Parish Nurse and Health Ministry, established in 1991, also offers education, networking, consultation, collaboration, problem solving and encouragement to approximately 3,500 parish nurses and other health ministers nationwide. With a focus on the needs of the whole person, parish nurses epitomize the art and science of nursing by providing professional health care to their neighbors, ever mindful of the connection between faith and health.