

numa

caring for the spirit in island health

Secret Angels

"You're an angel." She said this not only to me but to most all the health care professionals who cared for her as she neared the end of her life on the Palliative Care Unit at NRGH. "You're an angel". She said it to nurses who tended to her with compassion. She said it to the doctor who gently adjusted her medications providing her maximum comfort to be able to connect with her family in her final days. She said it to the Speech-Language Pathologist who kindly helped with swallowing and communication. She said it the Social Worker who graciously helped tidy up some loose financial ends. She said it the cleaner who happily tidied her room each day – "You're an angel."

We are in the midst of a season where some folks think a lot about angels. And even if thoughts of rosy cheeked cherubim never cross your mind it is interesting to understand that the root meaning of the English word angel is *messenger*. Many cultures and traditions around the world have stories, myths and traditions concerning angels. Some are divine and some are just everyday folk - but at their core angels were those tasked to deliver special messages to others.

Which brings us back to the NRGH PCU and those words - "You are an angel." Health Care Professionals may not think of themselves as angels but in actual fact every time we care for another person we are delivering a message. The *way* that we care for them is that message. A physician who shares difficult news with compassion and empathy sends a message of care. A manager who looks not only to schedules and bed numbers

May you embrace the beauty in what you do and how you stand like a secret angel between the bleak despair of illness and the unquenchable light of spirit.

John O Donahue, A Blessing for a Nurse



but to the spirit of the team she supports delivers a message of care to each of them. A Spiritual Health Practitioner who gently creates space for a patient to find meaning in the midst of despair delivers the message that who they are is as important as what is going on in their body. So if you are a health care professional you are an angel.

The late poet and mystic John O' Donahue once penned a blessing for nurses which is also applicable to most health care professionals. In that blessing he says "*May you embrace the beauty in what you do and how you stand like a secret angel between the bleak despair of illness and the unquenchable light of spirit.*" That directive to embrace the beauty in what you do, to embrace the way that you show up for people is an important one to remember. Not every patient says such kind

words to their health care providers like the woman in the PCU. Not every patient expresses thankfulness. Not every patient is appreciative of the care shown to them. Which is why it is so important for each of us to embrace the beauty in what we do each and every day.

As 2022 draws to a close may each of us do just that - embrace how we have delivered messages of empathy, compassion, cultural safety and gentleness to so many this past year. You truly are a secret angel standing between the bleak despair of illness and the unquenchable light of spirit.

Happy Holidays!

from your
Spiritual Health Team

For more information on Spiritual Health staff can visit the [Spiritual Health intranet page](#)

We have a winner!



Congratulations to Shelina Point for her submission to the Spiritual Health Week's - "What lifts your spirit?" contest.

Thanks to everyone who submitted such wonderful and inspiring entries!

Welcoming New Spiritual Health Practitioners



*Paul Truman, Spiritual Health Practitioner
Cowichan District Hospital*



*Lydia Collin, Spiritual Health Practitioner
West Coast General Hospital
(Starting January 16, 2023)*

NUMA (Greek for "spirit/breath") is produced by Island Health's Spiritual Health team to draw awareness to issues of spirituality in health care. The editor of numa is Darren Colyn, Spiritual Health Leader. To read past issues of NUMA go to the [Spiritual Health public webpage](#).

Island Health's Spiritual Health team members acknowledge, with humility and gratitude, that we live and practice on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish, Nuu-chah-nulth and Kwakwakaw'akw people. We commit ourselves to ongoing learning as we work towards reconciliation and strive to ensure that the spiritual beliefs and practices of all people are supported for their individual and collective wellbeing.