

The Chrysalis Singers are a group of High Peaks Hospice volunteers who sing to hospice patients. Our mission is to provide comfort and hope through song. We've been doing this for about four years. Presently, we have 20 singers who come from all parts of Essex County (and two from Washington County). Most, but not all, of us are retired. Musical ability ranges widely, but everyone is comfortable (or at least willing) singing *a cappella*. We use no instruments, except an occasional guitar. Our repertoire includes chants, secular songs, spirituals, hymns and a couple of anthems. Choice of music is based on the religious affiliation, preferences and sensibilities of each patient and family. We consider our work more meditation than performance. As one of our members put it, we don't do "weddings, bar mitzvahs or mall openings....." (although we did sing at one marriage renewal service).

We try to keep governance and musical direction as democratic and participatory as possible, while minimizing singers' exposure to the legally required hospice and Medicare regulatory oversight. We keep attendance for purposes of reporting volunteer hours to hospice, but attendance is strictly voluntary. We try to maintain a standard of singing without being perfectionistic or intimidating. We learn new music slowly and gradually; sight reading is not expected. If we're not enjoying the work and finding it fulfilling, then we're not doing our job correctly. We have no prima donnas. We take time to support each other as well.

Logistically, here's how we operate: We rehearse once every two weeks, typically once on the second Thursday (noon-2 pm) and on the fourth Friday (7-9 pm) of each month, although there are some exceptions. We never get all of us together at one place or time; life does not permit that, and we don't expect it. Locations change from month to month to even out the driving burden. Hospice staff inform their patients of our work and let us know if any of them would like a "sing." If so, we call the family, ask what sort of music they like, and pick at least two possible dates. Then the singers are e-mailed to find out who can attend which dates; we choose a date, and e-mail singers confirming the date and time. Then I select music and send directions. Our sings are almost always in mid-afternoon on weekdays. We also sing at nursing homes occasionally, and at the spring and fall memorial services held by hospice staff for all their patients and their survivors.

If you would like to learn more about Chrysalis, you are most welcome to visit with us, meet the singers, "kick the tires" and size up the group and whether our style meshes with your own sensibilities.

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