

It's not about dying, it's about living? - Doors open on 10-bed Margaret Bahen Hospice



By Brock Weir

As a palliative care doctor, Arnell Baguio has heard it all before.

Whether they are words of comfort like, 'Your job must be very difficult,' or more tongue-in-cheek like 'Here comes Dr. Death,' either avenue offers a good chance to engage in an important conversation, and it is one he started on Wednesday night as Southlake Regional Health Centre formally opened the doors to The Margaret Bahen Hospice, a new ten-bed residential hospice, just the second residential hospice in all of York Region.

Dr. Baguio, a palliative care physician and physician education lead for the Palliative Care Residency Program at Southlake takes on the role of Medical Director at the Margaret Bahen Hospice for York Region.

At Wednesday's opening, which was attended by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Chris Ballard, Aurora Mayor Geoff Dawe, Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen and a host of other dignitaries, he told the assembled crowd he first experienced the world of palliative care when his grandfather became ill in his mother's house and they decided to look after him at home.

'When the time came, I felt he actually died very peacefully in his room surrounded by the people he loved and that experience left a lasting impact on my life,' Dr. Baguio recalled. 'When I meet patients for the first time I will often have to explain what palliative care is. It is not about death or dying, it is about life or living. It is a philosophy in care for someone who is at the most vulnerable part of his or her life. The goal is to ensure that his or her quality of life is maintained or even improved, free of pain or discomfort as much as possible, be it physical, emotional or spiritual, through impeccable assessment, management of symptoms given by an interdisciplinary team.

'I ask my patients to [imagine the future]: What kind of care they would like when their own time would come? Most would tell me they would like to be kept as comfortable as can be and die peacefully in their homes, if possible. However, they also tell me although they do not fear death, what they fear the most is what happens before they do? 'Will there be pain? Will I become a burden to my family? Will I be remembered? How will I be remembered?' Patients do not want to leave a lasting memory of hardship to their spouses or children. They would not want their loved ones to go through enormous stress and burnout about caring for them at home.'

And that is where the Margaret Bahen Hospice comes in.

The Margaret Bahen Hospice is the result of the 'Love Lives Here' campaign launched in 2014 by the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation.

Ground was officially broken last November. It was then the Foundation announced the new facility would be named in honour of Margaret (Marg) Bahen, honorary chair of the Campaign and a resident of King Township until her death shortly before the groundbreaking.

She and her husband, John, were cited as among the most generous donors to the campaign which, to date, has raised \$9 million of their \$12 million goal with fundraising efforts ongoing.

?It was really Margaret's passion,? said Susan Mullen, President and CEO of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation. ?She and her husband John, and then their family, really got behind the idea of a residential hospice and worked closely with us in the very early days of the planning. It is really thanks to them that we're able to be here today. ?We're now bringing the heart to this building and this is a service we're all waiting for in the community.?

The facility, which was expected to welcome its first palliative care patients on November 1, boasts 10 beds in residential suites which will serve as many as 250 patients and their families each year. Each suite features a spacious area for the patient's bed, furniture for visiting loved ones, an individual garden into which the bed can be moved and, for the resident's spouse, a Murphy bed which can be adjusted to the height of the hospital bed.

?The Love Lives Here Campaign was launched by Southlake to advance a very urgent gap in palliative end of life services in our Region,? said Dr. Baguio. ?The Margaret Bahen Hospice is a very special project for our community as it will complete the medical journey for many of us, providing comprehensive care from diagnosis to treatment that many of the specialty services that are already here until the very end of life which can be done here at Margaret Bahen. It will allow loved ones to remove the caregiver hat so they can focus on making positive and lasting memories.?

?I will no longer have to ask them to imagine what their future will be like,? he added, addressing donors and supporters. ?You are all making it real for them and, because of you, we can truly say that in our community, in this hospice, love lives here.?