

NATIONAL NURSING WEEK 2016

#NNW2016 MAY 9-15, 2016



Transitional caregivers: Registered nurses Bernie Ali (left) and Tara McNaughton.

PHOTO BY DARCY FINLEY

HEARTS OF GOLD REQUIRED:

MISERICORDIA INTERIM CARE NURSES SHARE SPECIAL BOND WITH RESIDENTS

By Kristin Marand for the Free Press

There is a vacancy for a Registered Nurse (RN) in Cornish 2, the Interim Care Unit at Misericordia Health Centre, but the position can't be filled by just anyone.

The ideal candidate must possess the right blend of skills and experience, along with one special attribute — a heart of gold, says Tara McNaughton, Resident Care manager.

"One thing that I've learned over the time I've been in management: everybody comes with qualifications but it's the heart that I can't fix. You have to have a heart for what we do," McNaughton says.

Interim Care's three units (Cornish 2, 5 and 6) provide a comfortable home-like environment to 112 people who are waiting to get into the personal care home of their choice. The seniors admitted to Interim Care primarily have been transferred from a Winnipeg hospital and deemed unable to return to their own homes.

"These are people that are very vulnerable; they're going through a lot. We have to be very understanding, we have to be compassionate and kind. I've realized we can affect how people feel; it gives me the warm and fuzzies inside, because it means something," McNaughton says.

The clients of Cornish 2 are called residents, a term that's indicative of the respect staff have for the people with whom they work. Supporting people and their families in the midst of a transformational life event can be incredibly stressful, which demands the team around the residents and their families be strong and work well together.

"We work as one great big team and that, I think, is what the strength of our unit really is. It's that everybody knows everybody's name, we're not just numbers and we really try and work together to support the residents and give them the best quality of care we possibly can," McNaughton affirms.

The staff in Cornish 2 take care to make sure each resident feels welcomed and at home, whether that means adjusting

a bath time, allowing for a phone call or a snack or having fun nicknames inspired by the residents. McNaughton smiles as she recounts the story of one former resident, a big fan of the TV music show *The Voice*. She liked to be called Shakira and she would call her health-care aide Christina.

Cornish 2 is a unique environment in the Manitoba health system. The team is tight-knit and in it for the long haul. Previous nurses have stayed on for more than 40 years. Speaking to the qualities it takes to maintain that kind of longevity, McNaughton cites character, flexibility and a willingness to learn. To work in Cornish 2 is to be fully invested in the team, which McNaughton calls her "family."

And it's not just in individual units that the family mentality is part of the culture, but rather throughout the entire facility.

"I think Misericordia is a very special place to work. People really believe in the vision, mission and values. I

longevity. Another factor is McNaughton's guidance and sunny disposition. A caregiver with more than 20 years' experience, McNaughton has worked in many roles within nursing, from health-care aide to licensed practical nurse (LPN) to RN and manager, and she isn't afraid to get her hands dirty.

"I know everybody's job role very well and I can help all my staff figure out easy ways to do things. I understand what they're going through, what their experience is. And they're aware I have no problem helping assist one of the residents with one of my colleagues," she says.

It can be bittersweet to work in a transitional unit, McNaughton admits. On the one hand, staff form wonderful relationships with the residents and their families and then have to say goodbye when they leave. On the other hand, constant change requires the team to be ever-evolving: learning, adjusting and thinking outside the box. Rising to the occasion to meet the needs of each new resident keeps the unit moving forward.

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think we all believe there is something better that we can do or create here," McNaughton says.

"It also helps that we can recognize each other as you walk down the hallways. When you see somebody on the elevator you talk to them, you just say, 'Hi,' whether or not you know them, but you know they're wearing a uniform or a name tag, so they're one of us, so we just acknowledge that.

"We are one big family and we really are colleagues no matter what job we do. We're all part of one bigger piece and we just acknowledge everybody as people."

Having exceptional senior leadership that supports the ongoing education of the staff in Cornish 2 is a contributing factor in the unit's success and staff

McNaughton and the team at Cornish 2 believe it is a pleasure and a privilege to meet and work with the many different and unique people who spend time in their unit. The residents truly do become like family to the staff — like the Opa or Baba you never had, explains McNaughton.

"They have come into my life and have shared with me their hearts and their life experiences and have impressed upon me how I can always do better — to be more inspired, to give back or try doing different things to make somebody smile, and my team shares that," she says.

"There are people that have really impressed upon our hearts — that have changed me. It's just such a pleasure to become a part of somebody's life and to walk some of their journey with them. It's priceless." +