



WE HONOR VETERANS

FROM RECRUIT TO LEVEL FOUR IN SEVENTEEN MONTHS YES, IT CAN BE DONE

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When Hospice of Acadiana, Inc. received news on October 26, 2012 that we had achieved Level Four in the *We Honor Veterans (WHV)* Partnership, we became the first hospice in Louisiana-Mississippi and 37th in the United States to reach that level. Approximately 1,600 hospices across the nation have joined *WHV* at least as a Recruit since 2010. We began as a Recruit on May 21, 2011, only seventeen months earlier. I will describe how we accomplished this feat.

Recruit

The Recruit Level involves a commitment from the Hospice Organization Leadership to enter into the partnership with the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) and the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). The only requirement is a signature on a form indicating commitment. Begin your orientation to the partnership by accessing the *WHV* website and reviewing the resources available.

Level One

Level One focuses on providing education for staff and volunteers regarding care of Veterans at the end of life. Information regarding the unique needs of Veterans is available on the website. PowerPoint presentations are available for educating your staff. We began using the Military History and Veteran Benefits forms available on the website. We had always identified the Veteran status of our patients, and this expanded our knowledge of our Veteran patient's experience in the military.

We were fortunate to have these forms on our electronic documentation and were able to retrieve the data via reports. We were new at this *WHV* Partnership, but had a short Memorial Day Celebration by raising the flag and reciting the Pledge. This level took us less than a month.





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Level Two

Level Two involved additional organizational, staff, and community education and Veteran activities. We began developing *WHV* policies. We provided in-services to our staff and volunteers and to Veteran and civic organizations in our nine parish service area. Other activities included radio and television appearances and newspaper articles. We provided guest speakers, one of whom discussed Veteran Benefits in detail and left Louisiana DVA brochures including the names, addresses, and phone numbers of area Veteran Services Officers so the social workers would know how to contact them to meet Veteran patient needs. We created Appreciation Cards to give to Veteran patients on admit to our hospice. We completed Level Two in a little over two months.



Level Three

Level Three activities increased in intensity and scope. The focus was on developing and strengthening relationships with Veteran facilities and organizations. Since we do not have a Veteran hospital or nursing home in our service area, we provided additional in-services to American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Kiwanis, and Lions Clubs as well as staff and volunteers. We also participated in a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Celebration where we distributed information, pinned large boutonnieres on each Veteran and thanked them for their service. We heard many stories and shared information about our program. We assisted at the Traveling Vietnam Veteran Memorial Wall when it came through our town and heard many more stories and shared tears with visitors at the wall. We had a Veteran's Day Celebration with guest speakers including a Pearl Harbor Survivor and the Chairperson of the Coalition to build a multipurpose Veteran clinic in Lafayette. We have been involved in their activities also since Level Two. For Christmas each Veteran patient received a pillowcase of Americana fabric. Level Three took approximately five months to complete.





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Level Four

Level Four was even more intense with increased organizational activities, policies, and educational programs. At this level, it is expected that policies are in place and are being evaluated. The Veteran-to-Veteran Program (Veteran Volunteers visiting Veteran Patients) should be developed and visitation begun. We provided additional in-services to Veteran volunteers so they could understand how to meet the needs of Veterans at the end of life. Information regarding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other issues were discussed. The social workers also received additional training regarding medical conditions and other



issues related to different war eras, accessing Veteran benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs, and obtaining lost military papers. They learned more about collaborating with patients and families to plan funerals, including military honors. We also continued community education during this time. Since emphasis is placed on evaluation at this level, we evaluated use of the Military History Checklist and Veteran Benefits forms, collected and evaluated Veteran patient demographics, and evaluated Veteran volunteer visits with Veteran patients. We have been using the Family Evaluation of Hospice Care (FEHC) for years and have been submitting this data to NHPCO. In June of 2011 we began enclosing FEHC-V, the Section Five Veterans component, to families whose

loved one was in the military. The returned surveys were tallied and we developed a Performance Improvement Project to attempt to increase the number of completed surveys returned. We finalized policies regarding all aspects of the *We Honor Veterans (WHV)* Partnership. During Level Four, we decorated and rode a Veteran Float in the Christmas parade and had an impressive Memorial Day Ceremony in May. When we believed we had met all of the requirements for Level Four, we submitted our Activity Form and all additional information to *WHV*. Level Four took approximately nine months to complete. This was due in part to the need to evaluate our program so we needed enough data to submit evaluations.

You probably want to know “How difficult was it really to achieve Level Four in only 17 months? It probably would be impossible without the assistance of the *We Honor Veterans* website, NHPCO, LMHPCO, and HPNA. The information, modules, PowerPoints and handouts came directly from the website. We accessed webinars, telephone conferences, and attended seminars at conferences. The Activity Reports for each level state the required activities and you just have to follow the guidelines and document each activity on the form. Include any attachments required and email to Veterans@nhpco.org. It does take time, attention to detail, and



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a commitment to improve the care of Veterans in your hospice. It requires commitment from the organization leadership, staff, volunteers, and the community to move through the levels. Finalizing policies and evaluating each aspect as required in the Partner Level Four Activity Report and including all attachments took time and effort. However, it was a very proud day when we received our Level Four achievement letter.

Celebrate!

We are continuing to care for our Veterans (average of 10 new Veteran admits per month). We are continuing to learn more and improve our care for Veterans. Level Four is not the end of our Veteran endeavors. We had an impressive Veteran Day Celebration in November along with service branch specific certificates (from the *WHV* website) for each Veteran patient. We had our Veteran Float in the Christmas Parade in December. We also had a Pearl Harbor survivor sharing stories and memorabilia with us on December 5 for the 71st anniversary of Pearl Harbor attack on December 7. For 2013 we already have two speakers: one from the LA Department of Veteran Affairs to bring us new information and booklets and one from the American Legion Post 271 to hold a POW-MIA Ceremony. We will continue to access webinars and teleconferences for additional education of our staff, volunteers, and community. I challenge each hospice in Louisiana and Mississippi to join *We Honor Veterans* Partnership and to move through the levels. Let us be one of the first states to achieve 100% Level Four hospices!

