

The Gift of Hope *Mended Hearts Builds Relationships, Provides Encouragement*

Mended Hearts is a national and community-based non-profit organization that offers the gift of hope to heart disease patients, their families and caregivers. As the largest congenital heart disease (CHD) peer-to-peer support network in the world, their mission is dedicated to inspiring hope and improving the quality of life for heart patients and their families – helping people who have experienced any type of heart event understand that there can be a rich, rewarding life after heart disease diagnosis.

Volunteers go through special training to become accredited Mended Hearts visitors and handle the common concerns of heart patients. WakeMed chapter visitors then listen, share their experiences, and talk to other heart patients about what they may face including lifestyle changes, depression, recovery, and treatment. This can be accomplished via:

Hospital Visitation – In person visit prior to a procedure or while you are recovering

Online Visitation – Email check-in and presentation of materials electronically

Phone Visitation – Calling to provide a word of hope.

Education is also a key component, and Mended Hearts offers various educational sessions on subjects related to the heart from both WakeMed presenters and outside speakers. “Even though we work within the walls of the hospital, our chapter has also participated in community events such as Go Red for Women, the AHA Heart Walk, and the mid-atlantic region's Mended Hearts Education & Training Conference,” said cardiovascular patient educator Hazel Covington.

In 2017, they will continue seminars and speakers on topics like transcatheter aortic valve replacement (TAVR), as well as a guided tour of a local grocery store to understand and promote tips for heart healthy eating. As WakeMed works closely with Wake Technical College and their Associate Degree Nursing program, one of the largest and most exciting projects of the new year will be establishing two scholarships for nursing students.

Anyone can join Mended Hearts and attend educational activities. The WakeMed chapter meets monthly and offers support, education and activities for cardiac survivors, their family members as well as medical professionals in the cardiology field. For information about Mended Hearts of the Triangle – WakeMed Cary Hospital, call 919-350-0875. For information about the WakeMed Raleigh Campus group, call 919-350-6888.

To become a visitor to patients and their families, you must have had a cardiac event yourself, be a member of Mended Hearts, and go through the WakeMed volunteer program's orientation and the Mended Hearts chapter accreditation program. For further information, please contact

Covington (hcovington@wakemed.org, 919-350-6888) or incoming president Bud Coggins (bud.coggins@gmail.com).

SIDEBAR PROFILE

The WakeMed chapter's visitors have made over 1575 visits to patients and their families thus far in 2016. One of those visitors is Samuel Collins, a retired City of Raleigh worker who makes the trip from his home in Beaufort to counsel others. Following a 2013 heart attack and open heart surgery, Collins was in a dark place in his life. He didn't want anyone else to go through that, so he chose to be a light – a ministry – for those suffering.

“Modern technology gives us assurance,” Collins said, “but there can still be a lot of fear. What's going on? What's going to happen? Who is in control?” He ministers to patients, sharing the love of Jesus, and providing empathy for what lies ahead.

Although each visitor has their own technique, Collins sees himself as a disciple, building relationships, taking the edge off, and sharing words of encouragement. “The patients and the families can be overwhelmed and have trouble dealing with it all. They see my countenance, that I am sensitive to them, and they begin to tell me their story.”

As most surgeries are scheduled early in the week, Collins likes to do pre-operative visits on Sundays. He meets patients and families, sharing how his own surgery was a life changer, and that the Lord has brought him through. He offers support to loved ones, and is sometimes requested in the ICU following surgery.

“Jesus Christ gives doctors the capacity to heal; they are the experts, but they have not personally gone through each procedure. After my surgery I said, ‘Lord, you have to give these people someone to give them hope.’ He answered, ‘If not you, then who?’ He opened the door.” Now, Collins strives to be a light in what can be a very dark situation. He sees the road to recovery as a spiritual one.

“Once He brings you through, it's time to live, not just exist. Walk into your purpose and your destiny,” Collins said. “Everyone is fearfully and wonderfully created and has more purpose than they've ever been told. We all play a role, and we can work together for the greater good.”