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# Helping patients with the next step

## Social workers help patients get back into the community safely and smoothly

Social worker Bettye Craft works 12-hour shifts in the Tacoma General Emergency Department. Today has been slower than usual, she says. But no day is the same.

“There’s something new and different each and every day,” Craft says.

Craft is one of five social workers in the emergency department, meeting and assessing patients and connecting them with the services they need, such as transportation to follow-up appointments, mental health assessments and help paying for prescriptions.

Tonight she helped a trauma patient get in touch with his wife and let her know what happened and where to find him. The patient, who suffered burns and fractures after his welder tank exploded, was in good spirits despite his situation.

“Tell her I’m not gonna make it,” he jokes to Craft and his emergency room nurses, who all burst into laughter, knowing he was going to be OK.

“Your sense of humor’s intact!” Craft quips.

Another part of her work is helping determine whether it makes sense to connect a patient to MultiCare’s Personal Health Partners program, which offers patients a dedicated person — a personal health partner, or PHP — to help make the transition from hospital to home a smooth one.

“We try to address many issues beyond the initial complaint that brought them here,” she says. “For example, you may come in because of a cough but you can’t afford the medicine or you don’t have insurance.

“Basically, we help people with the next step after their emergency room visit,” she continues.

Craft, who has worked for MultiCare 17 years, says she commonly sees homelessness, chemical dependency and mental health issues in patients accessing the emergency department.

“It has become the norm for us,” she says. “The ER is a safety net for these folks.”

But her job is rewarding when she’s able to connect these patients with services they need and has success getting them out of the hospital and back into the community.

“You see what they need and it gets accomplished,” she says. “It doesn’t happen every shift but it does happen often.”

She was smiling at the end of her shift tonight, joking with coworkers.

“Every day’s a good day,” she says. “I like the people I work with.”

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