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Volunteer co-ordinators play key role

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Volunteers play an integral role in a hospital's community.

And just like any other community, in order to work together successfully, it takes a strong leader to keep everyone organized.

That's the role of a hospital's volunteer co-ordinator. Just ask Jeanny Wilson, manager of volunteer services for the Friends of University Hospitals — a volunteer, non-profit organization committed to enhancing patient comfort through volunteering. The Friends have volunteers in the University Hospital and the Stollery Children's Hospital. Eleven-hundred volunteers all-told, 750 of whom are active. And Wilson is in charge of organizing them all.

"It's just a lot of co-ordinating," she admits.

Wilson has been at the hospital for 25 years. She started in a human resources position and moved on to patient relations when she was able to take the executive leadership in the non-profit sector program at Grant MacEwan College, which brought her to her current position. She said a human resource management or volunteer management degree would also help prospective volunteer co-ordinators.

But there's one thing that can't be taught, according to Wilson: The way you deal with people. As a volunteer co-ordinator, that's perhaps the most important skill you can have.

"You have to really like people and be kind to people," she said. "That's what keeps (volunteers) coming back, because they're not getting paid."

Betty-Lynn Zukewich manages volunteer services at the Misericordia Community Hospital. Zukewich has about 85 different program areas at the Misericordia alone. Some are in-house and work directly with patients, and some work in the community.

"Our volunteer numbers fluctuate throughout the year, but last year we recorded 712 volunteers at this site alone with over 84,000 hours," Zukewich said. "That's just our site, there are other sites too."

Zukewich said her main role as a co-ordinator is to look after orientation, training, placing, scheduling and generally keeping an eye on the volunteers. She said it's important people realize the volunteers are there as tools to help the professionals, not to hinder.

"Volunteers are not placed in program areas to replace staff, they're here to enhance the staff," she said. "All the roles are selected and screened and assignments are defined very carefully so that we enhance and don't take away from anything."

There are many volunteer opportunities within a hospital. From general medicine to helping out in the gift shop, there's a job for everyone. If you're interested in learning more, visit the Covenant Health website at www.covenanthealth.ca or Alberta Health Services at www.albertahealthservices.ca.

for Metro Canada



It takes strong leadership to be a volunteer co-ordinator.