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## **Volunteers in hospital and home care: a precious resource.**

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**AIMS AND BACKGROUND:** Ten years ago, a program of intervention by volunteers in cancer hospitals and at home was started. Home care is accomplished by teams of palliative care givers, in which volunteers are included. After a selective interview, all voluntary candidates with the necessary qualifications are trained and specific apprenticeship is done. Hence, their professional training is carried out through regular groups of supervision followed by a psychologist and a coordinator. A study was carried out to evaluate the activity of volunteers, in the hospital and at home, as judged by patients, nurses and the volunteers themselves. **METHODS:** On the whole, the data analyzed concerned 216 patients, 163 nurses and 92 volunteers in the hospital and 30 patients, 16 nurses and 35 volunteers at home. The questionnaires used for the study had four possible answers (no, a little, much, very much) or required an answer on a scale of 0 to 10. **RESULTS:** A high quota of patients gave a very positive opinion ("much" or "very much") on the importance of the presence of volunteers in the hospital (76%) and at home (90%). In the second case, volunteers were particularly useful to improve a patient's mood (80%) and to solve practical problems (47%). General agreement was noted among nurses and volunteers on the activity of the latter. The main form of intervention of all volunteers is to give psychosocial support to patients. A score of 7 to 10 was given to this item by 60% of the nurses and by 82% of the hospital volunteers. At home, respectively 80% and 89% gave such a score for the same item. Other activities of the volunteer were support for the family, assistance in social activities, and to give information. **CONCLUSIONS:** The presence of the volunteer in the hospital and at home appears to be helpful to the patient and the family by becoming part of the team without becoming involved directly in its clinical activity.