



KATHLEEN CABLE

Gulfside Regional Hospice Inc. President and CEO Linda Ward, right and nurse Jaime Goddard visit with patient Betty Melvin.

## Gulfside Regional Hospice stays ahead of health care industry challenges

### OVERALL WINNER Health Services category winner

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**NEW PORT RICHEY** — A proactive approach to regulatory change and a creative take on fundraising has helped Gulfside Regional Hospice stay ahead of the challenges in the health care industry.

Partnerships also are vital to Gulfside, which provides hospice and palliative care to terminally ill patients and their families in Pasco County. The organization, which serves more than 300 patients daily and had a \$23 million budget in fiscal 2010, is the winner in the Health Services category and the overall winner of the Nonprofit of the Year award.

One major challenge is coordinating the highest levels of quality and standards with increased regulatory scrutiny and reimbursement changes. Gulfside seeks out advice from national and state associations to stay up-to-date on regulations, and has systems in place to ensure compliance in day-to-day operations, said Linda Ward, president and chief executive officer.

Revenue largely comes from Medicare and Medicaid. MedPAC, which advises Congress on Medicare, has recommended a change in reimbursement that would pay more per day in the earliest and last days of a patient's hospice care, when services are most needed, and less for days in the middle.

"That's our biggest challenge now as an industry," Ward said.

Lacking a strong endowment, Gulfside has creatively drawn on other funding sources, including five thrift shops that provide \$1.5 million annually in revenue, and signature events, such as the "Hike for Hospice," in which former Tampa Bay Buccaneers player Mike Alstott participates. This year, a 5K run has been added to the hike to bring in more participants.

Gulfside's fundraising is successful in part because of the loyalty of the families it has served.

"When people receive hospice care, we're there as much if not more for the family as the patient," Ward said. After a loved one dies, family members want to give back. "I can't tell you the thousands of cards and letters and calls I've received, asking what can I do to thank [the] staff."

The hospice strives to be a good steward of the money it receives. Program spending is 73 percent of total income and 79 percent of total expenses, according to information in the organization's application packet. Fundraising costs are just 1 percent of income.

Gulfside built its first freestanding inpatient care center, the Gulfside Center for Hospice Care in Zephyrhills in 2008, and incorporated a new business line entitled Pasco Palliative Care LLC to diversify and expand care. Its strategic plan calls for developing programs and facilities to serve unmet needs, and expanding in parts of Pasco County that are not currently being served.

The plan calls for Gulfside to continue to develop partnerships with businesses and health care providers so they can share costs and double the positive impact for the end user. The organization currently partners with two skilled nursing and rehab centers that have inpatient hospice units.

Other partnerships include joint educational programs with community service groups, supplemental care to emergency room staff in hospitals and a visiting chaplain program in assisted living centers.

As it expands, Gulfside also will implement initiatives to recruit, maintain and develop workers and to become the employer of choice for Pasco County, the strategic plan said.

"We are all about the 'We' and 'Team' in everything we do as we provide for others in need," Ward wrote in the application. "That compassion and passion is coupled with a strong business acumen and leadership model that stays current with industry changes and prepares for stability and security to keep the company intact and fruitful."