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In this photo: [Vicky Maurer, RN](#)

Her Patients, Her Friends

Compassionate Care award winner Vicky Maurer, RN, leaves a lasting impression while caring for patients with cancer.

Long after their treatments are over, many of Vicki Maurer's patients return to the hospital just to say hi. Some have invited Maurer to their homes or to their children's weddings. One former patient, now 90, sends Maurer Christmas cards every year.

"What I really love about the oncology practice is the relationships you develop," says Maurer, RN, BSN, OCN, a nurse clinician in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at the Robert H. Lurie Comprehensive Cancer Center of Northwestern University at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. "You are seeing the same patients for months, even years sometimes. They become more than your patients, they become your friends, and I find that so rewarding."

Because of Maurer's dedication to helping patients through the many challenges of cancer treatment, she received a Compassionate Care Award for 2013. She is one of three Lurie Cancer Center caregivers honored with the award.

One of Maurer's former patients is Nora C. Marra, a member of The Women's Board of Northwestern Memorial Hospital. Marra wrote a letter nominating Maurer for the award, saying she felt she had been "on a journey with a good friend."

"Vicki gave me the confidence I desperately needed and assured me with her warm and caring way that I would get through all of this," Marra wrote. "There is something about Vicki's professionalism, calm manner and absolute devotion to her patients that shines through with every interaction."

After graduating from nursing school Maurer, who's from downstate Illinois, intended to work in pediatrics. Instead, she wound up working with ear, nose and throat physicians and found her way to oncology. When she interviewed for a nursing job at Northwestern, there was an opening with Steve Rosen, MD, director of the Lurie Cancer Center, and Al Benson III, MD, the associate director for clinical investigations. "I was very lucky to end up with these two guys. They're outstanding clinicians," she says.

Maurer's colleagues think they're the lucky ones.

"The phone will be ringing, her pager going off, call lights ringing and she is calm and reassuring and her patients are always first," wrote Helen Sivicek, RN, OCN, a nurse clinician in the Division of Hematology/Oncology at the Lurie Cancer Center. "She is one of the most compassionate people that I know and I am proud to work along side her and to continue to learn from her examples."

For Maurer, who's been with Northwestern for 17 years, compassionate care means helping patients understand the disease process and simply being there for them. "Because this is a very life changing experience, even in the best case scenario, when you know they have a highly curative disease, there are still changes their life," she says. "I think they want someone who can understand what they're going through. To just be available to them to listen and provide the support they need, that's huge."

It's easy for Maurer to feel close to patients. "You hear a lot of life stories and things about their family members. The holidays come around and people say 'I should have you around my house for Thanksgiving.' I feel in a lot of respects we do become part of their family."

Even when the outcomes are not as hoped, Maurer is there to help. "Obviously in oncology, the results are not always positive in their life," she says "But there are so many positive things we can do in terms of support and quality of life for as long as they have."

Each year, Compassionate Care Awards are presented to individuals who exemplify and serve as role models for their humanistic and compassionate care for oncology patients. The Woman's Board of Northwestern Memorial Hospital created the award in 1991. Others recognized this year are Julian Schink, MD, and John Galvin, MD. Watch for stories on the other winners in upcoming weeks in Connections online.