

"A Member Of The Family"

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Director of Hospital Visitation

This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from a speech given on several occasions by M W Brother Dougherty. Because of its reception and relevance to the Masonic challenge of "relieving distress," it is shared with us as a meaningful explanation of the Masonic Way.

Have you ever felt lonely, sad, depressed, all alone? Wishing that someone would stop and say hello, smile at you, give you a pat on the back or shake your hand and ask you if there is anything they can do for you and mean it sincerely? If you haven't had these feelings, you are either extremely fortunate or you are living in a dream world.

In everyone's lifetime, moments like that arise. For some unfortunate people it is not moments, it is an eternity.

There are men, women and young people who dedicate their lives to this kind of service to their fellowman. You and all of Masonry benefit by the charitable acts of this comparative handful of dedicated servants of God.

The M.S.A. Hospital Volunteers represent the Masonic Fraternity in its finest image. They are constantly putting Masonry's best foot forward by helping the sick, the suffering, the lonely, and the dying at Veterans Hospitals throughout the country. They do this for anyone who needs them – not just Masons!

Our Masonic Fraternity can and should be a beautiful plum. But if we are only interested in ourselves, it will dry up and lose its beauty.

If we are dedicated to the service of God through brotherly love, relief and charity, then we will grow and prosper and be what The Supreme Architect intended this, the greatest Fraternal Order in the world, to be.

Last year, more than 71,000 visits were made in hospitals, nursing homes, and convalescent centers all over the United States, for a total of over half a million hours of Masonic charitable service by M.S.A. volunteers.

The Hospital Visitation Program is truly a sleeping giant! One that gives citizens throughout America a favorable impression of what Masons and Freemasonry really represent.

We are our Brother's Keeper! We can expand this Hospital Visitation Program into something that will help our beloved Craft.

But there is a catch to it – it is going to mean getting yourself involved. Are ye able, asked the Master?

What Does A Hospital Visitor Do?

We've answered that question many times; we'll probably answer it again. Many times, in many ways.

And we're glad to do it, because we want Brethren to know what these special Masons, called Hospital Visitors, do for our veterans; what they're like; how they go on foot and out of their way to serve a fallen brother.

What does a Hospital Visitor do? First of all, he visits. He goes to the bedsides of the hospitalized veterans to bring friendly greetings, word of encouragement, a smile, an attentive ear, a word of sympathy, an offer to help – whatever he realizes is the need of the moment.

It takes a big heart, an understanding mind, an everlasting patience, and a real love of people to do that kind of visiting day after day, week after week, in spite of tragedies, failures, and frustrations that frequently and naturally take place in houses of healing such as V.A. Hospitals. Masonic Hospital Visitors are that kind of special men. That's why they are so greatly appreciated. That's why we're so proud of them.

A Hospital Visitor helps the patient to establish lines of communication. He explains some of the methods and ways of doing things in a large hospital. He sometimes carries messages for the bedfast serviceman to others in the hospital. It might be a soldier buddy . . . or a staff member . . . or a Veterans Service Officer, the Chaplain, or the physiotherapist. He helps the patient to keep in touch with his immediate surroundings, an important link for a weak and helpless veteran who cannot leave his bed.

When the hospitalized serviceman wants to contact those outside who mean the most to him, the Masonic Hospital Visitor can make a long distance telephone call for him. Or he may send a telegram for him about an urgent business matter. Often he writes letters for the really sick man. On his own, he communicates with members of the family to reassure them. For Christmas and birthdays, he wraps packages and mails them for the helpless patient.

When he finds a Brother Mason among his patients, the Hospital Visitor writes to his lodge to notify them of the Brother's hospitalization and condition; he keeps the mystic tie as closely knit as he can. Sometimes, he helps to restore a suspended Brother to membership, and often he is proud to present a 50-year pin to an elderly patient who is far, far away from his mother lodge.

He Helps The Patient's Relatives

A Masonic Hospital Visitor meets many of the relatives who come to a Veterans Hospital to visit the patients. Sometimes making arrangements for their overnight lodging is a service he is happy to provide.

A Masonic Visitor is a mature and sympathetic person. Visitors frequently turn to him for encouragement and help. The Masonic Field Agent is often regarded as "a member of the family."

Good Samaritans

A hospitalized veteran needs hands and legs to do those things he usually does for himself when he's up and around. Running errands, going to the store, getting the paper, are just a few of the ways in which our Masonic Samaritans become the hands and legs of a bedfast veteran.

The patient wants his watch, his radio, his glasses, or his lighter repaired. The Hospital Visitor takes it to the shop downtown for reconditioning, and fetches it back when it's ready.

Sometimes the Masonic Representative is entrusted with a personal shopping problem, to select a birthday present or Valentine for a sweetheart, a sweater for Dad, a rock record for a kid sister, a book for Uncle Jim, or any number of things. Our Masonic Field Agents have been involved in such personal shopping services for everything from engagement rings to motor cars!

He's A Member Of The Team

The Voluntary Services in Veterans Hospitals are furnished by more than forty National organizations whose representatives work together to provide creature comforts and personal services which a large medical facility is not able to supply. In every such Hospital, these organizations are associated in a local Veterans Administration Voluntary Service Committee, which coordinates the voluntary service activities and helps to establish policies and programs. Your Masonic Hospital Visitor is a member of that team.

He helps to arrange entertainments and special programs for Hallowe'en, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and other holidays. He often brings in Masonic groups for such activities, such as Shrine bands and clowns, or DeMolay, Rainbow, and Job's Daughters carollers. Thousands of Masons, their ladies, and Masonic young people have been enlisted for hospital service, especially for chapel escort work on Sundays.

With other voluntary organizations, the representatives are called upon to help stage an annual Carnival on the Hospital grounds, or arrange expeditions for ambulatory patients to a baseball game, a Shrine Circus or a football game. For Masons in that category, a Field Agent arranges visits to a nearby lodge, usually taking care of the transportation himself.

Like representatives of other service groups, the Masonic Hospital Visitor is ready to provide useful gifts for the hospitalized veteran, items he cannot readily get for himself, such as toothbrushes, combs, paper, pencils, or pens, razors or razor blades; books, magazines and stationery. At times he has even managed to find a requested musical instrument!

A Masonic Field Agent and some of his volunteers can frequently be found helping in the recreational program, operating a motion picture projector, or teaching a skill in the arts and crafts program. Whatever the call may be, the Masonic Hospital Visitors answer with a helper if they have the skill available. That's part of their team work.

Your Masonic Hospital Visitor also works in harmony with the members of the Hospital Staff. He observes the required rules and regulations. He makes the necessary reports to the Voluntary Service Director. He attends the monthly meetings of the local VAVS Committee. He tries to be a professional among professionals, although his work depends on a warm personal interest in each hospitalized veteran.

For that, he is sincerely appreciated by his co-workers, the professionals as well as the volunteers. Masonic Hospital Visitors are distinguished by their insistence on personal contact between Freemasonry and the ex-servicemen, most of whom are not Masons and know almost nothing about it. They make the neglected soldier with very few friends realize that he has not been forgotten, that somebody cares. And for the hospitalized Brother, they weave a strand of the mystic tie. For this kind of service of brotherly love and relief, the tenets of our profession have prepared these special, dedicated Visitors. In addition, however, they were carefully selected and specifically trained by experienced Brothers, who taught them to cooperate with hospital authorities, to make the one right approach to the bedside of the individual patient, and to do it consistently day after day.

Your M.S.A. Hospital Visitation Program is supported entirely by voluntary contributions, large and small, from individual Masons, Lodges and Grand Lodges and Concordant Bodies who are interested in helping their fellowman and have a deep concern for others.

Unfortunately, all Grand Jurisdictions do not support this charitable program. Only 39 states take an active part in providing the M.S.A. Hospital Voluntary Services. We hope that the day will come when every Grand Jurisdiction can say with pride, we do our share, too.

There are 172 Veterans Hospitals across this country. At present, we have Masonic Volunteers in 110 of them. The only reason we are not represented in all 172 Hospitals is because of a lack of funds.

All contributions to the M.S.A. Hospital Visitation Program are Tax Deductible.

If you have time and want to become involved in a program that will give you a feeling of self-satisfaction and pride, knowing you are helping those who cannot help themselves, write to us. We will make your life meaningful.

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