



Attendees at NHPCO's recent Clinical Team Conference (CTC) in San Diego had the opportunity to meet a special celebrity guest, Torrey DeVitto, who presented the Volunteers are the Foundation of Hospice Awards with Rex Allen, the vice chair of NHPCO's National Council of Hospice and Palliative Professionals.

For those who may not be familiar with Torrey, she is an accomplished actor currently appearing in the ABC Family TV series, *Pretty Little Liars*, where she plays the Ivy League, over-achieving sister, Melissa Hastings, and on the CW hit-series, *The Vampire Diaries*, where she has a reoccurring role as Dr. Fell. She has co-starred in *One Tree Hill*, the series *Beautiful People*, and has been seen on shows such as *Castle* and *CSI-Miami*. Others may know her from movies such as *The Rite*



with Anthony Hopkins or *I'll Always Know What You Did Last Summer*. Torrey is also a talented musician who—to the delight of many NHPCO staff—plays violin on one of the tracks of Stevie Nick's new CD.

What is perhaps most fascinating to the hospice and palliative care community, however, is Torrey's work as a hospice volunteer. For more than four years, she has been serving as a volunteer at Mission Hospice in Glendale, California.

Last year, Torrey reached out to NHPCO to see if there might be a way she could help raise awareness of hospice care among the nation's young people—where she has an extremely enthusiastic fan base. After discovering her

# Meet NHPCO Hospice Ambassador, Torrey DeVitto

Photo courtesy of  
J Squared Photography.

role as a volunteer, NHPCO was honored to have her join us for CTC to present our Volunteer Awards.

Torrey, who was joined by her mother, Mary DeVitto (an enthusiastic hospice supporter herself), also met with CTC participants in the exhibit hall; took part in conference activities; joined FHSSA for the “From San Diego to Africa” fundraising event (where she picked up some treasures at the silent auction); met the NHPCO board of directors; and joined leadership in a tour of San Diego Hospice and The Institute for Palliative Medicine.

NHPCO is honored to welcome Torrey as our first official NHPCO Hospice Ambassador—and we are already putting her to work! Attendees at the 27th annual Management & Leadership Conference will see her this March, where she will join us

for the conference; speak with legislators on Capitol Hill; raise awareness of FHSSA activities; celebrate with us at the National Hospice Foundation Gala; and more.

NHPCO president/CEO, Don Schumacher, spent some time with Torrey and asked her questions about her involvement with end-of-life care. We hope their conversation will help you get to know our first Hospice Ambassador.

**DS: When did you first get involved with hospice?**

TD: I first got involved four years ago as a volunteer.

**DS: Did you know much about hospice before that?**

TS: No, I didn’t really know anything about hospice, but as soon as I became aware of what hospice does, something clicked and I knew this was an area that I would want to contribute to.



*Torrey (center) toured San Diego Hospice and The Institute of Palliative Medicine while attending 2011 CTC. Shown with Torrey are (l to r): Melissa Delacalzada, director of communications and community relations; Kathleen Pacurar, president/CEO; NHPCO’s Jon Radulovic; and Jenny McGee, executive assistant.*

**DS: You certainly lead a busy life in Los Angeles. Why did you get involved with volunteering?**

TD: I was in a place of wanting to do something more meaningful in my life, besides my professional work. I was researching ways to volunteer on the Internet. I thought I wanted to work at a children's hospital or do something involving kids. Then, somehow, Mission Hospice popped up in my search and the more I learned about hospice, the more I wanted to be involved. I called immediately, signed up for the training session and I have been a volunteer ever since. I absolutely love being a part of this. Volunteering with hospice definitely filled the void I felt in my life at the time.

**DS: We know volunteers do all sorts of things for programs. What do you do as a hospice volunteer?**

TD: I count myself fortunate to work directly with patients. Basically, I do whatever each patient that I am assigned to wants or needs me to do. I do a lot of reading to my patients—which is something we both enjoy. I have helped patients and families sort through possessions to help put things in order. But most people I spend time with just want to talk.

They just want to talk to someone who will listen. They find so much comfort in being able to re-tell stories from their lives and I am honored to share those precious memories with them.

**DS: Looking back at what you've learned as a hospice volunteer, what do you think is one of the biggest misconceptions about hospice?**

TD: I think one of the biggest misconceptions is that it's scary to be with the dying, or that it would feel too morbid to be a part of it. I have found such a light in being a part of hospice, one I would have never have thought I'd discover. It's beautiful to be a part of the circle of life. To be a part of both sides of this important journey of living—the coming in and the going out. Being a volunteer helps me appreciate things in my own life so much more.

**DS: Is there a specific incident you've had that really made you stop and reflect on care of people at life's end?**

TD: Yes. With one patient I cared for, I was deeply affected when I realized how alone he was. He was estranged from his daughter and had no living relatives or friends. He was completely alone. Besides me and the other members of the hospice team, he had no one to talk to, no one to be

there with him on his final days. That really broke my heart and that's when I realized that THIS is the main reason I do this. No one should die alone.

**DS: Can you recall a time when you had what some people call a "hospice moment"—a time when hospice made a transformative difference in the life of someone else?**

TD: There was one family I worked with where it was so clear to me the difference hospice makes. If it had not been for hospice, they would not have been able to get through this hard time in their lives. It was a daughter, who had her husband and three young children, but she was taking care of her mom with no support. Hospice came and made a world of difference for all of them. The times that I or other hospice staff would be there were the times they were able to shower, feed themselves, tend to the children and do whatever else was needed. I have never felt so much appreciation as when I would come by for my hourly visits.

**DS: May I ask you a question about your professional life? You're going to be working with your husband, Paul Wesley, an actor on *The Vampire Diaries*, this season. Is that going to be challenging?**



*Torrey during the volunteer awards presentation at 2011 CTC: At the podium, delivering opening remarks; with her mother, Mary DeVitto, and NHPCO's Don Schumacher; and with Volunteer Honoree Marlys Pillatzke of Rice Hospice; NCHPP Vice Chair Rex Allen (on left); and NHPCO Board Chair Mark Murray (on right).*

TD: Well we haven't had any scenes together yet, so as of now, I still wouldn't know! Getting to join this cast has really been such a great experience thus far.

**DS: The two of you do other worthwhile advocacy work as well. Can you tell me about it?**

TD: Paul and I are involved with the nonprofit organization, Global Roots, a grassroots children's charity helping to improve the lives of needy children who have been orphaned or abandoned in

a place of war, famine or social unrest. Global Roots is doing work in Kenya, Afghanistan, Gaza and Cambodia. I think it's so synergistic that one of NHPCO's affiliates, FHSSA, is supporting such important work in sub-Saharan Africa. I am hoping that if my schedule allows it, I will be taking a service trip over to Africa with Global Roots in the summer, and before or after that I would also like to visit hospices in the same area through FHSSA.

**DS: Let me tell you how impressed I am that you are both working on behalf of important causes. It reminds me of the passion many of us hospice pioneers felt when we began this work many years ago.**

TD: Thank you, Don. Hospice is something that will be a part of my life till the end.

**DS: One final question. If you could share one key message about end-of-life care with Americans your own age, what would that be?**

TD: That being a part of the end of life is just as beautiful as being a part of the beginning of life. To not be afraid of the unknown that hospice may seem to them. I think that, especially for my generation, death has become such a taboo subject. But there is something so uplifting when you put yourself in touch with reality and help aid someone to be as happy and comfortable as they can possibly be at the end of their journey on earth. I would want to emphasize that support and appreciation for hospice is a necessity.

**DS: Torrey, thank you so much for sharing this with us. We feel incredibly fortunate to be able to work with you to help increase awareness of hospice.**

TD: Of course, it's my pleasure! I am looking forward to being with many of my hospice friends this March at the MLC.

## **New T-Shirts Designed by Torrey Celebrate the Spirit of Hospice**

As part of her role as NHPCO's Hospice Ambassador, Torrey has designed a special t-shirt to celebrate the spirit of hospice and help raise awareness—especially among her young following and their parents.

The short-sleeve t-shirts feature the hospice message, Comfort•Love•Respect, in a vintage cut that flatters both women and men. The message on the back reminds us that hospice is about how you live.

The t-shirts will be on sale in NHPCO's Marketplace in the coming weeks, with all proceeds going to the National Hospice Foundation in support of NHPCO's consumer engagement initiative, Caring Connections. Look for announcements in the weekly e-newsletter, [NewsBriefs](#).

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it's about how you live