

## **VISITING NURSE/HOSPICE ATLANTA**

### **Sant and Tara Khanna**

When Sant Khanna's father died ten years ago at a hospice in North Carolina, he and his wife Tara were impressed with the care he received. So impressed, in fact, they decided to volunteer in a hospice program when the opportunity presented itself. Life, career, and family intervened until 2007 when they learned of the comprehensive volunteer training at Visiting Nurse / Hospice Atlanta. They went through the training and are now part of the 300-strong corps of volunteers for the community non-profit.

"It's become a priority in our lives," Sant, 69, explains. "People at the Hospice Atlanta Center [the newly renovated in-patient facility in Buckhead] know we'll be there every Thursday, visiting with patients and placing calls to families who have lost a loved one."

The 36-bed Center is known for its quality care, but the majority of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's end-of-life patients receive care at home. Families can request a volunteer to pay a friendly visit, give caregivers a break by sitting with patients, and even run errands. Tara and Sant do all this and more for patients in Roswell, Sandy Springs and Alpharetta.

"I try to put myself in their shoes," says Tara, 59. "I tell people they don't have to entertain me, just close your eyes and let me massage your feet. Sometimes I strike up a conversation. At the end of life, everyone is so authentic. You meet people heart to heart."

Visiting Nurse / Hospice Atlanta's services don't end when a patient dies. Sant is one of the volunteers who call grieving families for at least a year after a death, listening to their concerns, checking to see how they are recovering from the loss.

"We are learning to be more compassionate," Sant says. "People pour their hearts out to us and this touches us deeply. People are so appreciative of what Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta is doing for them, but we often feel we get more from this work than the people we serve."

The couple volunteers for other organizations as well, including Meals on Wheels, and they approach their work with devotion. "There are two kinds of spirituality," Tara says, "the kind where you go to a church, a temple or a synagogue, and the kind where you offer simple kindness, compassion and love to your community. This is what we do with Visiting Nurse / Hospice Atlanta. This is worship for us."

