

VA Palo Alto Hospice Brings Daughter's Graduation to Veteran Palliative Care that Cares

Sitting in his wheelchair, watching his family interact with each other, retired Navy gunner's mate Russell James has a look of happiness that most fathers would have on an occasion like this. He is about to watch his youngest daughter, Gianna, graduate from high school --only they are nowhere near a school. Instead, they are on the VA Palo Alto Health Care System's Hospice unit, where Mr. James is being treated for ALS.

Gianna is very close to her family, which is obvious from their interactions, and decided to stay by her father's side while finishing her high school diploma.

"I did online school for half of my junior year in Hawaii and the rest of my senior year when we moved to San Jose to be closer to my dad and VA," said Gianna. "I used the computer labs here at the hospital to do my school work while my dad was sleeping or busy with the nurses."

A Vietnam and a Desert Storm Veteran, Mr. James and his family spend most of their time at the VA Palo Alto hospital working with Palliative Care Social Work Fellow, Becky Anderson, who was instrumental in organizing the mini-graduation.

"He wouldn't have the strength and energy to make the trip," said Anderson. "I got the information for the principal and contacted her to come to the hospital so that Mr. James could be at her graduation. It's just part of the extra comfort care we provide."

Mr. James' wife, Tina, was extremely grateful for the VA care her husband is receiving. She spoke excitedly about getting a van that accommodates wheelchairs and how the VA helped her with all the paperwork. "This unit has met all of our needs, they've taken such good care of him," she said.

Mr. James' military service will also allow his two daughters to take advantage of the CalVet benefits that pay for the college expenses of Veterans' children.

When asked how he felt about the graduation, Mr. James said, "Very proud!"

