**Nomination for Georgia Medical Society’s**

**Seventeenth Annual Health Care Heroes Awards.**

**Allied Health Professional category:**

**Sara Breyfogle, MS, LPMT, MT-BC, Hospice Savannah, Inc.**

Many hospice patients experience physical and emotional symptoms such as pain, anxiety, and depression that significantly impact their comfort and quality of life. Hospice Savannah is proud to offer music therapy, a proven clinical intervention, as one of the many special services that ensure the highest quality care for our patients and set us apart from other hospices.

Our board certified music therapist Sara Breyfogle, MS, LPMT, MT-BC, works one-on-one with patients, using individualized, music-based techniques and interventions to facilitate relaxation, reduce symptoms, improve mood, and allow for self-expression. Music also creates moments of joy for many patients and their families, helping them reconnect with beloved songs and memories from special times in their lives, and to connect with each other. For patients with dementia, music is a powerful tool in helping to calm strong emotions and chaotic brain activity, and in being more present with others.

Sara recently wrote about her work with a patient who “doesn’t utter a word as I softly pick the strings of my guitar, playing tunes that are so familiar. Her husband holds her hand, gently rubbing her arms as she smiles with the music. Her eyes are wide and respond to each note. Mrs. Tucker was a pianist herself for many years, and there aren’t many notes that she will ever forget. But with Alzheimer’s, there are many things, places and faces she no longer remembers. She communicates now by responding to music, and the touch of Mr. Tucker’s hand.”

Sara’s passion and expertise are not only a gift to our patients, but to our entire community. Her skills are also shared with family caregivers at our Edel Caregiver Institute and with bereaved community members through our Full Circle Grief and Loss program. For overburdened caregivers, music therapy can help improve mood and reduce stress. For those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, music therapy not only helps in the expression of complicated emotions but offers a useful tool to manage grief. Sarah played an integral part in a recent workshop with local youth who have lost a loved one to gun violence, and is always included in the sessions offered at our annual Camp Aloha weekend children’s grief camp.

This tireless, soft-spoken young woman works energetically with volunteers who enjoy playing music with our patients and was instrumental in bringing the nationally acclaimed “Music and Memory” program to our Hospice House and nursing home patients. Under her tutelage, volunteers are trained to develop individual i-Pod playlists that are meaningful to the patient – perhaps a dance tune from their teenage years, or the song or hymn that was played at their wedding. The volunteer and patients simultaneously listen to the music on headphones and often a non-communicative patient will become verbal or smile for the first time their family can remember. They are indeed, still “alive inside!”

Hospice Savannah offers the only hospice music therapy program in our area, and Sara is one of few practicing board certified music therapists in Savannah. We are grateful for community donations and grant support which allow us to fund this important therapy and hope that the Georgia Medical Society will join us in recognizing the ground-breaking and important work Sara performs each day.