



VHA Voice

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Join Our PhotoVoice Study!

Explore Your Family's Health Care Journey Through Photography.

Does your child enjoy time with their PSW? Do you see them acting happier when receiving care? We want you to share their story with photos.

PhotoVoice is a new research study that VHA is working on and we are looking for parents of children with complex health needs who are receiving home healthcare services from VHA. All participants will receive an honorarium and the loan of an SLR digital camera to capture your child's special moments and care.

Interested? PhotoVoice is recruiting until mid-October!

Contact VHA's research associate Sonia Nizzer at: 416-489-2500 x4373 or snizzer@vha.ca to join.



Tips to avoid a "SAD" winter

Most people are affected in some way by the change from fall to winter. It's perfectly normal to feel a little sluggish or down in the dumps during a long winter. These "winter blues" usually fade quickly, and have little effect on day-to-day life. But if these feelings last a long time, and come back every winter, you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD). SAD is a mood disorder in which people who usually have normal mental health throughout most of the year show signs of depression during changes in season.

SAD is thought to be caused by a lack of light. It stops people from taking part in their normal lives and can put a lot of strain on relationships. Symptoms begin to lessen in the spring, when days get longer and there is more sunlight.

Common symptoms of SAD include:

- Trouble concentrating
- Feelings of sadness or despair
- Weight gain
- Irritability
- Feeling sleepy or lacking energy
- Less interest in work and social activities
- An increase in appetite and constant cravings for sweet and starchy foods



There are several things you can do to brighten your body and mind:

Keep moving. Adding 30 to 60 minutes of activity to your day can improve your mood. This doesn't have to mean going outside (although adding daylight to your routine can give you a double boost). If you like to watch television, try doing so while riding a stationary bike, walking on a treadmill, or even doing seated exercises.

Watch what you drink. Avoid alcohol and watch how much caffeine (e.g. tea/coffee) you drink. These can affect your sleep and make you feel groggy and grumpy. Drink lots of water.

Invest in a SAD therapy light. Studies suggest that exposure to a bright artificial light for 20 minutes to two hours a day can go a long way to boosting your mood and can be as effective as taking anti-depressants.

Snack sensibly. Simple carbohydrates like chocolate raise your blood sugar levels fast, and then just as quickly crash you down. Choose complex carbohydrates for energy, such as fruits and vegetables, whole-wheat crackers and multigrain breads.

Stay social. Many people socialize less during the winter months, but isolating yourself can worsen depressive symptoms. Make an effort to connect, whether it's talking on the phone, catching up with friends via letter/email or social media or, if possible, getting out of the house to meet up at a community program, class or club.



Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) also works to replace negative thoughts with more positive ones. It can be used in conjunction with light therapy. According to some, this is the most effective way of treating the disorder.

Be sure to talk to your doctor if the winter blahs are getting you so down that it is interfering with your day-to-day activities.

Find the Support You Need: Join a Peer Support Group for Caregivers

This support group, led by trained volunteer facilitators, provides caregivers with the opportunity to discuss the many challenges of caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease or dementias, with others who understand.

For information on upcoming dementia support group sessions and to register, please visit: www.alz.to.

This is a free event sponsored by The Alzheimer Society of Toronto.

Alzheimer Society
TORONTO

VHA Home HealthCare
Creating More Independence

Newsletter available in alternate formats on request.

Loved our newsletter? Thought we missed something? Want to be profiled or contribute?

We're interested in hearing your ideas, stories and suggestions! Email communications@vha.ca or call 416-489-2500 ext. 4344, toll free at 1-888-314-6622 ext. 4344

We're All Ears!



Meet Margaret Burrows, a VHA Client Voice Partner



Margaret Burrows

The last days of life, for many, are a difficult topic to discuss. But at one of life's most important and emotional times, every little detail home care providers can get right—from communication to system navigation to round-the-clock access—help create a positive palliative care experience.

A “good death” is very much the aim of VHA's Palliative Care Steering Committee, which includes three family members who all cared for their loved ones during their final days. The family partners work with a diverse team from all levels and areas of VHA to discuss their own challenges, set priorities and brainstorm solutions.

“I personally felt that I had everything going for me—education, resources, etc.,” says Margaret Burrows, a retired school principal who cared for her husband Gerry until his passing last year. “I'd been a board member at hospice Georgina for years before Gerry got ill and yet I struggled.” Margaret's

situation was further complicated by the fact that Gerry was one of the first people in Canada to be approved for Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD). “How were people who didn't have access to that information going to be? How could they possibly cope?” she asks.

“For me it was a natural thing to reach out and say, ‘look, we can make this easier and better.’” She called in Enrique Sáenz, VHA's regional manager for Durham and a member of the Palliative Care Steering Committee, to discuss the complexities and roadblocks of the situation. Enrique was so impressed by her insights and focus on quality that he immediately extended an invitation to join the committee.

Margaret accepted the offer and has contributed greatly to a lively crew of caregiver advocates who all share a common goal: to make the final days of life as stress-free and peaceful as possible for all involved. “Along with the other two caregivers, I think we've really been able to influence the end of life—in terms of support, resources, access and also the kind of care people are looking for.” The work has also given Margaret a space to discuss her own situation and honour Gerry's memory. “It has helped me with the grieving process. There are no two ways about it,” Margaret says.

The experience as a VHA Client and Family Partner has been overwhelmingly positive for Margaret despite the difficult topic the group is covering. “They are so keen to improve and they're looking at what they can get on with now...and it's happening,” she notes, adding that a new pilot project that aims to enhance lines of communication between the caregiver and the care team through secure text is already underway.

“There's a purpose,” she says. “The meetings are very well planned and work happens after. I've been amazed. I come into this building and it is a very welcoming place. What more can you ask of an organization than that they reach out to people that have experienced their services?”



Become a partner! Share your voice!

VHA is always looking to improve. Join the conversation. If you would like to share your thoughts and become a Client Voice partner at VHA, please contact [Stacey Ryan](mailto:sryan@vha.ca) at 647-460-8595 or sryan@vha.ca for more information.

Join Our Virtual Reality Dementia Research Project

People with dementia often experience aggression, agitation, anxiety, depression and apathy, which can cause high distress for them and their caregivers.



Virtual Calm is a new home care research study led by VHA Home HealthCare that hopes to provide some virtual solace and support to stressed out caregivers. This research project hopes to explore techniques to manage negative dementia behaviours using Virtual Reality (VR) technology in the home.

VHA is currently looking for participants! Who's eligible?

We are looking for people living with dementia and their caregivers who are 18+ years old.

Your care and privacy

You will receive the same quality care if you participate and two additional visits (approximately two weeks apart in your home), at a time that is convenient for you and your family. These visits should last 30-45 minutes. If you participate, your information is confidential. We won't show any identifying information in reports, presentations, etc. from this study.

For more information, please contact:

Sonia Nizzer, Research Associate, at 416-489-2500 x4373 or snizzer@vha.ca.

This study is led by researchers at VHA Home HealthCare and the University of Toronto. The research is funded by a grant from the Canadian Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation of Baycrest Hospital.