

WHAT'S INSIDE:



Dr. Bruce Empringham sits down to discuss the myths, impacts and risks of medical marijuana



VHA Playdate gets a boost from the upcoming Emajjin Foundation gala in October



VHA's research team shares national and international news from 2018!

THE EXCELETRATOR

Innovation and research news from VHA Home HealthCare

Issue 1, Fall 2018

Seizing the Chance to Try New Ideas

As the “new guard” settles into the provincial government, some previously proposed solutions are being scrapped while new announcements are made. This leaves us with the obvious question, “What’s next?” Instead of crystal ball gazing, let’s provide the new government and our Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) partners with great ideas to do what they’ve promised: *improve health care and end hallway medicine.*

Our health care system needs to be improved, but redefining the system is challenging. Players have vested/conflicting interests and resources are finite. But as health care organizations, we have the chance to bring fresh, creative ideas to the government to improve client outcomes and care experiences.

There are lots of health and home care models in our own backyard and elsewhere we can borrow—whether it’s ‘Hospital at Home’ initiatives in the States; Denmark’s

continued on page 2



VHA's CEO, Carol Annett (left) with Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Christine Elliott (centre) and Ontario Community Support Association CEO, Deborah Simon (right).

Nurturing Innovation for Growth, Health and More Independence

“Do you know what my favourite renewable fuel is? An ecosystem for innovation.”
- Thomas Friedman

With digitalization, artificial intelligence, an aging population and an ever-increasingly connected world, advances in health care are happening at warp speed. And while innovation is a buzzword in many health circles these days, VHA is going beyond the hype and taking innovation to a deeper level through the development of an overarching organizational innovation strategy.

“We’ve always been a leading-edge care provider,” says VHA CEO and President, Carol Annett. “When Barbara Blackstock-Cody began this organization in 1925 with just 14 homemakers, she couldn’t have predicted what the world or VHA would be like today. But inherent to her legacy was a vision of a better future and a constant push towards progress,” she adds.

continued on page 2



re-ablement program, which helps seniors get to their highest level of functioning; the Dutch model, Buurtzorg, in which teams of nurses provide neighbourhood care; or Australia's voucher system, where people can choose their care and provider from a service menu. Any combination can be tailored to fit Ontario's landscape.

Technology-enabled care delivery continues to explode and is clearly the way forward. From telemedicine to biometrics, artificial intelligence to health apps and software aimed at improving communication and care co-ordination: more start-ups and established vendors are entering the health care tech space. The possibilities are exciting, endless and make my head spin!

VHA's tech-focused research is underway—including using Virtual Reality to reduce dementia distress; automated short-term longitudinal analysis of speech and language in dementia; and investigating stress levels of those looking after loved ones with dementia through wearable technology.

Home and community care organizations need to be part of finding efficiencies across the health care system, particularly as the new government has announced the public piggybank is empty. Duplication of effort and unnecessary processes/rules in our work exist and add no benefit to clients (patients). We should identify them, get rid of them quickly and stay solution focused to help the government deliver on its promises.

One's home is not only the preferred place of care for most people, but also the most cost effective. Yes, long-term care beds are needed. But if we focus our energy on prevention and rehabilitation—keeping people well for longer, living active and vibrant lives in the community—we won't need the 30,000 new beds over the next 10 years this government has promised. Or if we do, they will look very different than anything we could even begin to imagine in 2018!

Carol Ansett

CEO and President,
VHA Home HealthCare



VHA is anchoring innovation in the organization and connecting it to the bigger picture around us. Our approved plan develops an ecosystem that:

- Creates a fertile foundation for innovation through development and refinement of VHA innovation structures that support strategically linked initiatives;
- Reinforces actions and behaviours to nurture, support and protect innovation within VHA;
- Constantly prompts us to evaluate outcomes, determine what's working, what's not and encourages us to pivot accordingly.

Expert Insights:

VHA leaders learned more about fostering an innovative culture through a series of Thought Leader Workshops. Megan Mitchell and Lee-Ann McAlear, who head up the **Schulich Business School's Strategic Innovation and Leadership Program**; Daniel Rose of **The Moment**, an innovation consultancy; and Marguerite Mcleod-Fleming of **Innovation Culture Group** all shared their insights on a range of innovation topics. These included characteristics of a creative work culture, effectively leading innovation, design thinking and managing change.

"We have lots of vehicles to generate innovation at VHA, and we have lots of brilliant and creative people working here who know where we need to innovate and how best to get started," notes Dr. Kathryn Nichol, Vice President of Quality, Best Practice, Research and Education, as well as the Sr. Sponsor on the initiative. "We're really looking to take innovation at VHA further by embedding it in every aspect of our culture. The education sessions—which also included a tour and presentation by the game-changing office space company **Steelcase**—offered a fresh perspective on how to do this and generated lots of excitement," she adds.

Sr. Communications and PR Manager, Pam Stoikopoulos, who was seconded for six months to work with the leadership team to develop the plan, will be sharing some of VHA's learnings and insights at the Ontario Community Support Association's (OCSA) conference on October 17, 2018 in her workshop, **Connecting the Dots: Making Innovation More than an Ad-Hoc Adventure**. For more information visit www.ocsaconference.com.

Lee-Ann McAlear (below) provided dynamic insights on innovation as part of a series of interactive workshops at VHA.





BIGGER & BETTER

VHA Occupational Therapists Join Palliative Care Team

The palliative care team in the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) area has expanded to now include Occupational Therapists (OTs). “I really think this is a wonderful initiative,” says VHA Toronto Central Regional Manager, Sandra Tedesco. “OT insights and expertise help us quickly handle equipment issues and help our clients (i.e. patients), especially those who are receiving longer-term palliative services, live as comfortably and independently as possible. The OTs I’ve talked to love being part of huddles and feel they’re making a real difference.” OTs are also well positioned to support clients with meaningful activities that add value and purpose until the client’s death.

Since June 2018, VHA has been actively delivering an integrated model of care in the Toronto Central LHIN. Before, these care teams included the client’s doctor, home care nurse(s) and personal support worker(s). But teams found that problems with equipment weren’t easily addressed and referrals for an OT visit took time. “Toronto Central LHIN stepped up with the idea and our OTs were quick to volunteer to be part of this initiative. It’s a great chance for them to join forces and be part of a team that really takes a holistic approach to palliative care to ensure the best possible journey.”

“My father died at home after two decades of Parkinson’s disease,” notes VHA OT Colleen O’Toole, when asked why she was quick to step up to be part of the palliative care team. “The last month of his life he had palliative home care and it ended with a very peaceful death at home, surrounded by family. It was a gift, both for him and for us.

I credit much of that to the expertise of the team coming in and making him feel as comfortable as possible and helping us feel capable of doing this for him because we had their guidance.”

“If I can have any part in giving back by easing someone’s death, or providing some care for the family in their grief, I consider myself pretty lucky.”

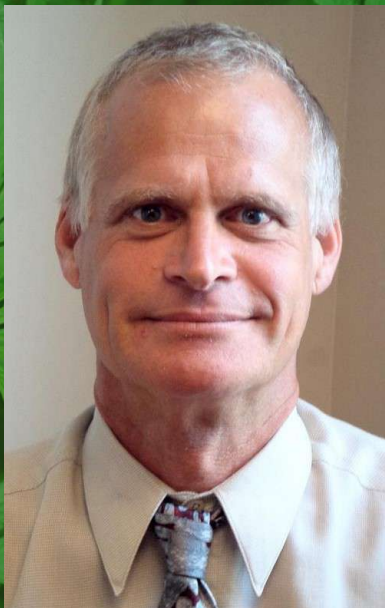
- Colleen O’Toole, Occupational Therapist

Being part of an integrated team, Colleen adds, really helps to open up the lines of communication between the team and with clients, respecting wishes and avoiding any confusion. It also helps proactively address issues that arise, because, as Colleen notes, “...situations can change rapidly. If I can have any part in giving back by easing someone’s death, or providing some care for the family in their grief, I consider myself pretty lucky.”

THE DOPE ON DOPE

On October 17, 2018 Canada's longstanding ban on recreational cannabis is lifted.

How will this change affect health care?



Dr. Bruce Empringham, Vice-President and Medical Director for Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life, discusses the myths, impacts and risks of marijuana on organizations like VHA.

What do you think are some of the common misconceptions about marijuana?

People tend to have different viewpoints depending on their age. Some older people are more likely to be terrified of drugs, envision the “stoner” lifestyle, and imagine people who smoke marijuana are totally unmotivated. Meanwhile, there’s a lot of misinformation touting marijuana on social media, which young kids see every day. If you see “pot is the cure for this” and “pot is the secret to that” over and over, eventually you’re going to believe it. So kids tend to be under-concerned and parents tend to be over-concerned. The truth lies somewhere in the middle. There are many imagined risks for marijuana that aren’t, in fact, a reality, but there are also fewer benefits than are being promoted. Basically, we have little scientific evidence on what the risks and benefits are, although the risks of marijuana to the brains of youth are well documented.

Pot has been touted as being an effective treatment for almost every health issue. What is the reality?

The evidence for marijuana as a treatment is really very limited. Dosing and efficacy are both issues that need conclusive evidence about marijuana’s short- and long-term health effects—whether positive or negative; it is still pretty sparse at the moment and much more research is required. There are specific conditions relating to pain and nausea where there is some limited evidence of success, but on the other side of the coin, there is some evidence that marijuana actually worsens certain conditions relating to mental health.

People commonly say, "marijuana is safer than alcohol." Is this true? What are the risks?

That’s a tricky question. A small amount of alcohol use has been shown to increase life expectancy beyond being abstinent, a benefit that has never been shown for marijuana. Marijuana is probably less addictive than alcohol, but it is still addictive.

There’s an argument to be made that marijuana should be moved a step ahead of narcotics as far as treatment for chronic pain, but there is a countering argument that marijuana may be an “entry” drug, i.e., desensitizing users to the fear of drugs, leading them to try “harder” drugs, like opioids. To be clear, nobody has proven that it is an entry drug... but that doesn’t mean it isn’t. Still, I wouldn’t be surprised if it is used before narcotics for chronic pain within the next decade.

A few places in the US have recently legalized marijuana. Have any health or social ramifications been seen because of this legalization?

We know only relatively short-term information, but we have seen more motor vehicle accidents in places where it has been legalized. And there has also been an uptick in paediatric overdoses from marijuana, but the overall numbers are still very low. There has also been some reduction in opioid deaths since the legalization of marijuana in certain states.

It’s reasonable to say that it’s unlikely much will change with legalization here in Canada, because use of marijuana in Canada is so endemic already.

How are other health-related industries, like insurance, preparing for legalization in Canada?

For most insurance providers, the impact is minimal. Our focus is on the risks and benefits of medical treatments. Marijuana defies easy classification. There is no drug identification number (DIN), which Health Canada only assigns once a drug product has undergone and passed a review of its safety, efficacy and quality. This means that the traditional guidance provided by Health Canada for new drug treatments – including approved indications, dosing, likelihood of side effects, etc. – are not fully available for cannabis.

Within the medical cannabis regime, health insurers

have to carefully consider the available evidence. There are differences between the scientific rigour around a traditional prescription medication and cannabis. Society as a whole will need to grapple with similar questions with recreational legalization. Many sectors are only now questioning how legalization will impact them. And individuals have to think about it too. For example, even if someone has a legal prescription for cannabis in Canada, what happens when they travel across the border with their medical cannabis?

It is going to be an interesting ride.

VHA's services (nursing, personal support, rehabilitation) are provided within the client's home; what things do you think home care providers and organizations should be aware of or consider as we prepare for the new normal?

Given your client group and the types of medical issues I suspect they face, your caregivers (workers) are likely to encounter clients who medicate with marijuana for their chronic issues. The first challenges that come to mind are smaller, incidental issues. If someone has a bag of marijuana they are using for pain treatment in their house, will care providers be at risk of being accused of taking some? It isn’t as easy to count and track marijuana quantities as pills. And if the client is smoking weed, there may be care providers that won’t work in a smoky atmosphere or have moral grounds for not wanting to work with that client.

Organizations need to think about what their expectations are for all staff, and in particular client-facing staff, and how policies will have to be changed. Will you treat this like alcohol? Or will you ban its use among staff entirely as a safety precaution and implement random testing? There is a lot to consider.

Playdate Gets Boost from Emajjin Foundation



VHA Playdate

Special Play for Special Needs



The laughter of children with complex medical needs playing together will soon be heard again thanks to the generosity of the Emajjin Children’s Foundation. The foundation selected VHA’s Playdate program as the beneficiary of its annual fundraising gala, a “Denim and Diamonds”-themed event, on October 14, 2018 in Scarborough.

VHA Playdate is a unique program that gives kids with complex medical needs a rare and much-needed opportunity to come together and socialize, play and just have fun as kids should—all under caring supervision from skilled caregivers who are trained to work with medically fragile children.

“We are thrilled that the Emajjin Foundation’s board saw the critical need for VHA’s Playdate program and the value it brings to families with children with complex medical needs,” says Dr. Kathryn Nichol, Vice President of Quality, Best Practice, Research and Education and Chief Nursing Executive at VHA. “Emajjin strives to partner with organizations that enhance the lives of children with disabilities to help them reach their full potential, so it is a perfect fit with VHA and our Playdate program, which lets kids be kids.



VHA Playdate participant enjoys a friendly (and safe!) visit from a snake and other animals as part of the program.

The VHA Playdate program was co-developed with client and caregiver partners who are parents of children with complex medical needs. This ensured that the resulting program would meet the unique needs of these families. A pilot of the program ran for two six-week sessions in 2017 to rave reviews. VHA has since been seeking funding to make the program permanent. With the Emajjin Foundation’s donation, we hope to run more Playdates and expand to different locations.

For more information please visit www.emajjin.org.



Emajjin Children’s Foundation



VHA Playdate participants learn and grow while having fun and meeting kids just like them.

VHA Vice President Barb Cawley Wins Honour of a Lifetime



On October 4, the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT) recognized Barbara Cawley, VHA's Vice-President of Client Services, with its Honourary Life Membership Award at its annual general meeting in Toronto. The award acknowledges the profound impact Barbara has had on clinical practice within VHA and across the home care sector over her amazing career.

A graduate of the University of Toronto, Barbara started as an Occupational Therapist (OT) in acute care over 40 years ago and then joined the community sector in 1985. In 2010, she became the first OT Vice-President of Client Services at VHA, where she provides interprofessional leadership to nursing, personal support, community support and five rehab services. Among her many achievements, Barbara has spearheaded VHA's success bringing co-design with patients and family caregivers to every aspect of our work. Because of her efforts, VHA now has more than 65 patients and family caregivers working closely with staff to define their needs and design solutions around these. She continually promotes the growth of OT within the LHINs, advocates for OTs with the Ministry and its ADP division, and strategically expands OT services within VHA.

"I can't tell you how honoured and appreciative I am of this Lifetime Achievement Award," says Barbara Cawley. "I have been a proud OT for 42 years. Whatever successes I have experienced over the years have been because I have worked alongside wonderful and highly skilled occupational therapists. I cannot express enough how much this award means to me."

Barbara is a go-to innovator and has paved the way for hundreds of OTs now by leading task-forces, project committees, think-tanks, advisory groups, steering committees and diverse teams with an untiring commitment to collaborative quality care. The profession has many reasons to be grateful for her contributions and the clients her ideas and passion have ultimately served.

"(The nomination) was a beautiful tribute to a true leader – one who leads with passion, perceptive vision, and a real respect for both the occupational therapists and clients that her work touches," Christin Brenchley, OSOT's Executive Director noted of the submission from Barbara's VHA colleagues.

Congratulations Barb!



RESEARCH IN ACTION

VHA's research team isn't just making waves around Toronto, we're also sharing our findings and insights throughout Canada and internationally.

2018 has been a jam-packed year for VHA's research team both at home, throughout Canada and in the United States.

Congratulations to Dr. Sandra McKay, Director of Research at VHA, who was appointed to the Workplace Violence Prevention in Health Care Research and Development Team, established by the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Health and Long-term Care.

Curiosity Carnivals held in Toronto provided our staff with games, lots of

giveaways, yummy food and tons of learning opportunities about VHA research to take in. Our modified version of the carnival at the **Health Shared Services Ontario (HSSO)** conference in June earned rave reviews from our Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) colleagues and competitors. Thanks to all who dropped by our booth—we want to know what your partners/colleagues said about the accuracy of our handwriting analyst!

Stacey Ryan, Client and Family Voice Liaison, and **Sonia Nizzer**, Research Associate at VHA (seen left), twice brought a poster display and presented on **The Little Things: Exploring perceptions and experiences of client and family-centred care through PhotoVoice (PhotoVoice)**. They first presented at the **Beryl Institute Patient Experience Conference** in Chicago, IL. in April and then at HSSO's **Achieving Excellence Together Conference** in Toronto in June. VHA held an exhibition featuring

the photographs of **PhotoVoice** at our Heart of Home Care Awards event, which celebrates unpaid family caregivers, in early April. This exhibit allowed the public to view some of the outstanding photos taken by VHA clients.

Dr. Sandra McKay participated in a panel at the **Scoping Review of Older Person's Living with Multiple Chronic Conditions Symposium** on May 22, 2018 in Toronto. Researchers from University of Toronto Nursing and Toronto Rehab Institute hosted the event.

Arlinda Ruco, a doctoral student at VHA, presents on VHA's Research Fellowship Program collaboration October 17, 2018 at the **Health Quality Transformation** conference hosted by Health Quality Ontario in Toronto.

The subject is **Building Research Capacity in the Community Healthcare Sector: Learnings from a first year collaborative research Fellowship program**.



Stacey and Sonia at the Beryl Institute Patient Experience Conference.

Research Action (cont'd)

Brydne Edwards will present a poster on her Research Fellowship Quality Improvement project **Addressing Physical Activity with Seniors in the Community with Cognitive Impairment** in Vancouver from October 18-20, 2018 at the Canadian Association of Gerontology conference.

This year's theme is *Making it Matter: Mobilizing Aging Research, Practice & Policy*.

Dr. Sandra McKay is looking forward to joining Brydne in Vancouver to present **Virtual Calm: VR in the home to decrease dementia distress** at the same conference.



A PhotoVoice family poses in front of their collage of photographs (top left). Heart of Home Care attendees check out the PhotoVoice exhibit (middle and right).



The Curiosity Carnivals at our Toronto offices and at HSSO brought people out to learn about VHA's research projects in a fun and exciting way with games and carnival food!



Stacey Ryan (left) explains the PhotoVoice project at the Beryl Institute Patient Experience Conference in Chicago, IL. Sonia Nizzer (centre) poses with the digital PhotoVoice presentation in Chicago.



Reducing Falls, Improving Lives

Whether it's stubbing a toe or bumping into a piece of furniture, injuries at home are common and can cause more serious harm as people age. Nearly 80,000 older adults are hospitalized each day because of a fall, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada, and many of these injuries happen in tubs or showers. Finding ways to prevent falls would not only save pain and suffering, but could reduce much of the \$3.4 billion health-care costs associated with falls according to the charity Parachute.

Grab bars, bathmats and other assistive devices can improve bathing safety and are often recommended by health-care professionals to help people with mobility limitations. But current clinical bathing equipment recommendations are based only on clinical experience and client perceptions of safety and ease of use, not clinical evidence. There is also little information on where grab bars and assistive devices are best installed.

VHA's \$450,000 grant from the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR) will help develop evidence-based recommendations for preventing falls and improving safety during bathing transfers and will help clinicians better advise on bathroom safety. VHA research will help in the development of national building codes and provide clinical practice recommendations to occupational therapists.

VHA's research team is excited to be working with leading clinicians and policy makers to support aging-in-place strategies that will positively impact building planning and prevent falls.

Active Studies

Health Tech Junior: Improving Care for Children with Breathing Tubes

When an airway is blocked, physicians may use a tracheostomy tube—inserted into a hole made at the front of the throat—to assist with breathing. SickKids Hospital, Toronto Central LHIN and VHA have partnered to uncover whether current paediatric tracheostomy education improves children's health care providers' (CHPs) skills and kids' tracheostomy tube care in the community.

Recruiting Older Clients in Toronto Central! WATCH study: Adding High Tech to Senior Living

We're looking for older home care clients to join our WATCH study – **W**earable **A**ging-in-place **T**echnology for use in **C**ommunity and at **H**ome. We want help evaluating whether "smart" wearable devices can help better screen and monitor frailty and prevent or predict a client's further decline. This study is in partnership with Waterloo University.

For more information on our research studies, please contact:

Sonia Nizzer
VHA Research Associate
snizzer@vha.ca

Partnership with UHN Cultivates QI Home Care Champions

What do paediatric palliative care and isolation among seniors have in common? Both will be the focus of new initiatives created through VHA's Research Fellowship program, delivered in partnership with University Health Network (UHN), to improve clients' experiences and outcomes.

The VHA-UHN Research Fellowship program launched in 2017 giving two VHA service providers a year to explore and execute a solution to a health care challenge. This summer, **Tandiwe (Tandi) Betani** and **Nadine Narain** were named 2018's Fellowship winners.

Tandi, a VHA Registered Nurse, will channel her passion for improving children's well-being into a project focused on palliative care nursing. "There is a gap in the literature and resources to effectively equip community-based paediatric nurses to engage clients and family caregivers in a way that's effective, meaningful and appropriate to improve the palliative/end of life care experience," says Tandhi. Her project—which includes creating a virtual library of resources for nurses—aims to improve awareness, best

practice and knowledge of nurses working with paediatric clients to improve care at this critical stage of a child's and family's life.

Occupational Therapist Nadine plans to expand VHA's volunteer program and address seniors' social isolation and loneliness through her fellowship project. Nadine envisions programs such as friendly home visits geared to the seniors' interests, including playing games, crafts, physical activities or simple conversation. She hopes to enhance clients' quality of life and help them feel more included and engaged in meaningful activities.

Both fellows look forward to the possibilities of improving care. "The Fellowship provides an excellent opportunity to be more involved in a quality improvement initiative that impacts both clients and service providers," says Nadine. For Tandhi, "This is an opportunity for me to do something I am passionate about and be able to learn something new at the same time."



Nadine (top) and Tandhi (bottom) are VHA's 2018 Research Fellowship winners

New Research Publications!

Nichol, K., McKay, S.M., Ruco, A., & Holness, D.L. (2018). Testing the Hand Dermatitis Screening Tool in the Home Health Care Sector. *Home Health Care Management & Practice*, 1-8. Doi: 10.1177/1084822318780012

Duncan, A., Guan, Q., Senthinathan., Wojtak, A., Seddon, G., & McKay, S.M. (2018). The economics of home safety assessments: How researchers used existing research data to complete an economic evaluation, *Occupational Therapy Now*.

Dr. Sandra McKay (left) and Dr. Kathryn Nichol (right) both published new studies in 2018



VHA Junior Research Grad Program Winners Announced:

VHA's Junior Research Development Program helps us find and reward the most promising young research scientists each year. Through this program, VHA co-funds three graduate students studying topics related to each of our research priority areas:

- (1) supporting people with cognitive impairment
- (2) caring for children with medical complexities at home
- (3) clinical and health service delivery in the community

We received a flurry of applications this year and are pleased to announce our 2018 winners.

Joseph Donia is a Master's student specializing in health policy at the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on understanding core assumptions that underpin patient and public involvement in health care improvement and innovation. His research aims to advance practice that is more inclusive, responsible and better able to act on the collective needs of clients, families and caregivers. His project, *Patient and public involvement in health care improvement projects involving design*, will "offer health care actors a tool for deploying ethical and inclusive involvement methods for innovation," says Joseph.

Husayn Marani is in his second year of doctoral studies at the Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation at the University of Toronto where he is studying Health Services Research with an emphasis on Health Policy. His research interests include social care, social health protection, and caregiver welfare. His dissertation explores the costs of caring incurred by family caregivers of people living with dementia in Canadian communities.



Joseph Donia (left), Husayn Marani (middle) and Joanne Tay (right) are all winners of VHA's Junior Researcher Development Program.

"VHA's Junior Research Development Program helps us find and reward the most promising young research scientists each year."

Joanne Tay is a Registered Nurse with a background in pediatric nursing, who is pursuing her PhD in Nursing at the Lawrence S. Bloomberg Faculty of Nursing, University of Toronto. Her research interest is to understand the family's experience when living with an ill child. Her study, *Exploring the healthy siblings' coping and adjustment trajectory in children with a life-threatening condition*, aims to lay the foundation to develop interventions which could best support these families. "Every family member plays an important role in caring for a child with complex medical needs. The family members' experiences affect the quality of care provided to the ill child at home. Exploring factors that affect their experience can help inform future interventions to improve the family's overall experience," says Joanne.

VHA Home HealthCare
30 Soudan Avenue, Suite 600
Toronto, Ontario M4S 1V6
Tel: 416-489-2500
Toll-Free: 1-888-314-6622
Fax: 416-482-8773

Alternative formats available on request.

For comments, inquiries or to report errors, please email communications@vha.ca

Champlain
Rehab Solutions

VHA Home HealthCare has no corporate or other affiliation with VHA Health & Home Support, also known as VHA Ottawa. VHA Health & Home Support can be reached through their website at www.vhaottawa.ca.

VHA Home HealthCare
Creating More Independence

 **United Way
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 ACCREDITED WITH
EXEMPLARY PERFORMANCE