



2019 Sponsors:



## Join us April 2nd for VHA's Heart of Home Care Awards

Now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year, VHA's Heart of Home Care Awards event celebrates the unsung heroes of the health care system—family and friend caregivers—on National Caregivers' Day. Held at The Forth Event Boutique in Toronto, the afternoon is sure to be filled with love, laughter, great stories, live music and maybe a few tears as we honour the incredible heart family caregivers show every day to friends and family members who are ill or living with a disability.

- What:** Heart of Home Care Awards, Keynote by Meg Soper and music by Stacey Renee.
- Where:** The Forth Event Boutique  
629 Danforth Ave, Toronto, ON M4K 1R2
- When:** Tuesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019  
2:00pm—3:30pm (doors open at 1:30pm)
- Note:** Sandwiches and light refreshments will be served. The venue is fully accessible.

RSVP by March 31, 2019 at

[bit.ly/HOHC Awards2019](http://bit.ly/HOHC Awards2019) or

416-280-8353



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](http://www.vhaottawa.ca).



WHAT'S INSIDE:



A look at Dr. Anthony Levinson and Dr. Richard Sztramko's new free, online education program for caregivers, dementia patients and their loved ones



Learn more about VHA's newest Digital Learning strategy, created as a way to support our staff to learn and optimize their performance



An invitation to experience an afternoon of inspiration at VHA's 15th Annual Heart of Home Care Awards on April 2, 2019

# THE EXCELETRATOR

Innovation and research news from VHA Home HealthCare  
Issue 41, Spring 2019

## Taking the Lead on Wander Prevention

On January 9th of this year, Barbara Kasler wandered away from her home at around 2:30am. The 89 year old lives with dementia and was found walking in her pajamas and slippers several hours later by a reporter covering the story. Alert but confused, she was cold but otherwise in good health.

Kasler's story is not unusual and, fortunately, ended well. But people with dementia (PWD) often lose their sense of time, wander at night and can face serious harm or even death. Their caregivers often find themselves "sleeping with one eye open," worried their loved one might go missing any given night. Data suggests that even infrequent and very brief nightly awakenings have significant impact on a person's critical thinking skills and their emotional tolerance the next day. Caregivers are under tremendous responsibility to ensure the safety of their loved one, and adding poor sleep to the mix can accelerate burnout and lead to earlier institutionalization for the PWD.

With this in mind, VHA Home HealthCare was excited to invest in the ongoing AGE-WELL study that uses technology to help seniors remain safe in their homes at night. The Nighttime Wander Detection System Study, a joint research project with doctors from Bruyère Memory Clinic and Carleton University, includes strategically placed sensors in the home that detect the PWD's movements. The system starts with a commercially available bed mat that senses if the PWD gets up at night. Once triggered, the Nighttime Wander Detection System lights a clear path to the bathroom. If the person wanders away from the typical route to the bathroom, an audio warning goes off in the voice of their caregiver with a message such as, "Sweetheart, it's nighttime; you should go back to bed." If another sensor is triggered further away from the bedroom, other warnings or signals will launch as determined by the caregiver, such as calling the caregiver's phone or turning on extra lights.

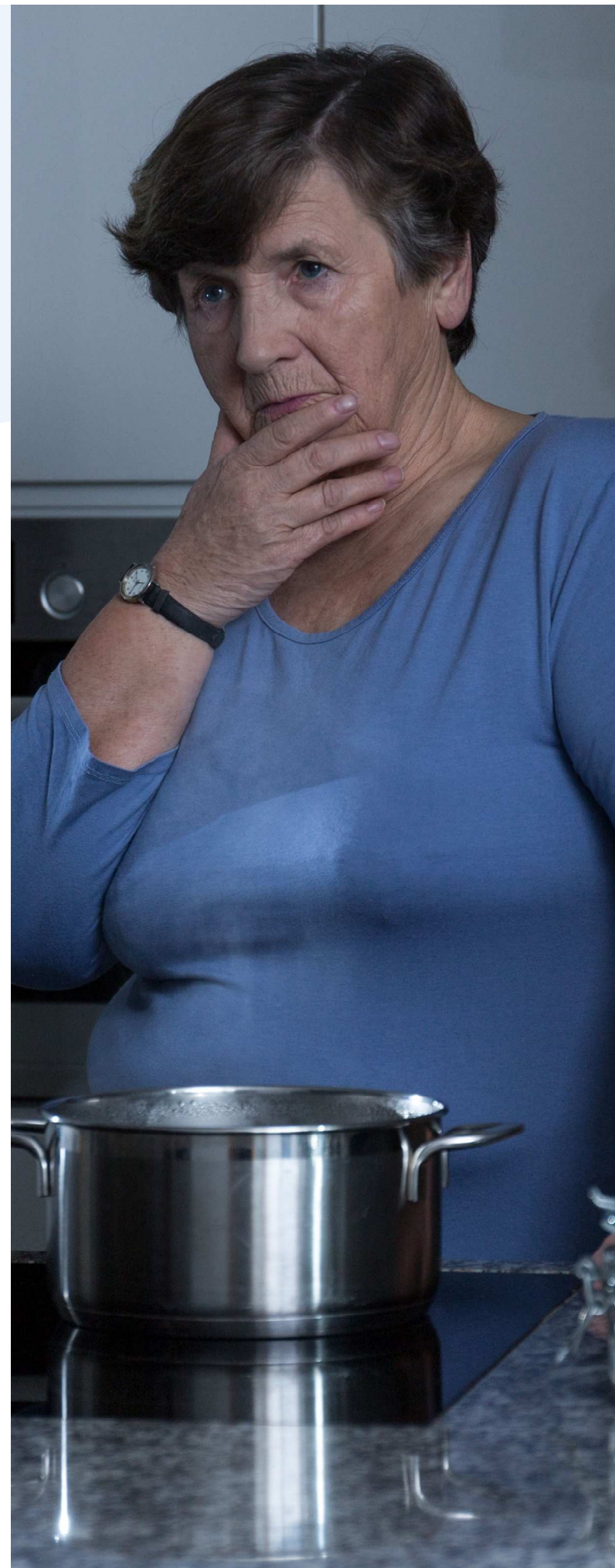


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The project is still in its early stages but has been successfully launched in eight homes. One of its challenges, however, is the available bed mats' small size. A PWD can trigger the system simply by rolling over and off the mat, which unnecessarily launches the lighting sequence and can be disorienting. VHA's investment in this project focuses on creating a better mat for the system. "Technology is fantastic," says Dr. Sandra McKay, Director of Research at VHA Home HealthCare, "but we need to work with the technology to truly address the needs of caregivers and their loved ones. I think these researchers have identified the proof of concept, and they can make this work, but there are opportunities for improvement."

The study's engineers are tracking the number of times participants wake up at night, the number of caregiver alerts, and the level of caregiver satisfaction, comfort and safety in the home. "I'm not only excited, but also grateful that these researchers are doing the hard work of going to individual homes in unique set-ups, organizing sensors, then going back and reorganizing the sensors if they're not quite capturing the information," says Sandra. "As researchers, it would be much easier to go to a long-term care facility to set up these sensors and use that as their proof of concept, but I think they truly understand how important this is to the families. It encourages the elderly to stay home longer, and as we always say at VHA, 'That's where people want to be.' "



## New Online Palliative Care Toolkit Designed by VHA Caregiver Partners

"When my husband was diagnosed with ALS and immediately deemed palliative, our family entered into a new reality—a frightening and confusing reality in which we had no experience," says Zinta Erdmanis, a VHA Client and Family Partner.

Stress and a sense of being lost at the start of their journey were common themes expressed by the caregivers on VHA's Palliative Care Committee and were feelings they hoped to ease for people facing a similar situation.

"The idea was to help others facing a similar palliative diagnosis and help them navigate the incredible amount of information out there," says Christina Darlington, VHA's project manager for the digital toolkit. "Caregivers can already feel overwhelmed by the situation, so we wanted a way to make it easier to get relevant information without taking a lot of time or energy sifting through it. Many of the articles are also specifically geared to topics related to palliative care in the home," Darlington adds.



Launched in December of 2018, VHA's Online Palliative Toolkit provides relevant resources thoughtfully chosen by caregivers, including:

- Articles on providing palliative care at home
- Support links to community resources and knowledge
- Tips and planning
- Upcoming events and information sessions

**Want to learn more? Visit the toolkit at:**  
[www.vha.ca/palliative](http://www.vha.ca/palliative)





Sasa Djumic is VHA's Clinical Educator for Nurses and Personal Support Workers. As a former nurse, he has been deeply involved in development of their educational materials.

multiple sessions, reserving space, refreshments, and taking staff away from their clients for the training. All are eliminated once an online program is developed. "It's a win-win for everyone if we do it well," says Sasa.

VHA's digital learning library now contains an array of tools for VHA's PSWs, rehab providers and nurses, including many clinical competency validation videos. These nursing videos demonstrate the equipment needed and the specific steps nurses must take to successfully execute procedures and pass VHA's competency evaluation. As a former field nurse, Sasa has been deeply involved in the development of these videos, applying his first-hand knowledge of the information nurses need and how they want it to make the videos most effective.

Continuing to build the library of competency videos is a priority for 2019, as is transforming VHA's staff orientation through digital learning. "We can direct new hires to digital learning modules that they can complete before coming to VHA for the in-person portion of the orientation session," Sasa says. "We also look forward to digitizing our orientation feedback procedures."

With the digital learning strategy, VHA continues to find new ways to engage our staff and empower them to take charge of their personal growth and career development.

*Digital Learning @ VHA is an instructional practice that uses technology to strengthen the learning experience. This includes everything from online e-modules, to videos to the integration of electronic lessons in a classroom setting. It is truly a useful training tool for professional development with many benefits.*

Flexibility is a key benefit on the learning side as well. The digital learning tools are available to users 24/7, allowing staff and service providers to pursue learning at their own convenience and pace until they are confident they understand the material. "Our staff love it because they don't have to call someone to book a class, etc., and if they need to go over something a few times, they can without judgment" says Sasa.

For VHA, it also offers the benefit of consistent messaging. "We aren't dependent on the varied styles and abilities of trainers or facilitators. These tools mean everyone receives the same information," notes Sasa. "There is also a great cost savings in the long run," he adds, citing the resource considerations of in-person training, such as securing trainers to prepare and deliver

## Online Support Program for Dementia Caregivers

With 25,000 new cases diagnosed in Canada, and roughly 570,000 Canadians living with dementia, the number of people left to navigate their new role as caregiver is steadily increasing.

To help bring more clarity to dementia, Neuropsychiatrist Dr. Anthony Levinson and Geriatrician Dr. Richard Sztramko developed a free, online education program for caregivers, dementia patients and their loved ones.

"Based on our work with caregivers and their families, we were really struck by the fact that health practitioners' quick and limited meetings simply do not allow enough time to give caregivers the information that they really need," says Dr. Levinson.

"Mounting demands can make it impossible to even imagine reaching out for more education, so we wanted to present information in a real and accessible way," he explains. This program is also meant to support areas that are still underserved when it comes to dementia resources.

iGeriCare offers 10 interactive lessons covering the essentials of dementia that caregivers complete at their own pace and in their own homes. Topics range from treatment options to managing aggressive behaviour to patient safety and caregiver wellness. "These lessons explain some really difficult concepts in a concise and relatively simple way to help caregivers get a better sense of how they are doing and offer strategies to take some of the pressure off," adds Dr. Levinson.

Caregivers can also browse the resource library or access online discussion groups to share their journey with others facing similar challenges. Online, live events give caregivers an opportunity to speak directly to experts and ask questions as they come up.

One of the greatest benefits of the iGeriCare program according to Dr. Levinson is the ability to share this learning with other loved ones. "By also educating children at a distance, siblings, spouses or friends who are not providing primary care can get a better understanding of the daily

burden, stress and challenges that caregivers face. This can make an enormous difference in someone's desire to reach out, offer support and get involved, helping to reduce stress and improve quality of life for both caregivers and patients."

iGeriCare is "in some ways very emblematic of the recent appreciation of the sheer number of individuals in these caregiving roles. The health-care system needs to do a better job supporting caregivers faced with a tremendous

amount of work under constant stress and pressure," says Levinson. Evidence supports that good education directly and positively impacts caregiver competency, stress management and mental health levels.

While Levinson and Sztramko acknowledge that this program

by no means solves the problem but, "It is a great starting point or primer, packaged in a fairly unique way, that we hope will engage and motivate caregivers to explore some of the other great resources that already exist and [that they] continue to reach out for support throughout their journey."



**iGeriCare's free lessons and resources can be found online at [igericare.ca](http://igericare.ca).**

*The iGeriCare project is currently funded through the Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation's (CABHI) Researcher Clinician Partnership Program with in-kind support from McMaster University. The project was initially launched with funding and support from the GERAS Centre for Aging Research, the Hamilton Health Sciences Foundation, the Alzheimer Society Foundation (of Brant, Haldimand, Norfolk, Hamilton, Halton Region), the SPARK Program from the Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation, and the Regional Geriatric Program Central.*



# Classroom Click

It is often said that knowledge is power. But in today's information age, knowledge—and sharing that knowledge—is not simply power, it can enhance performance and transform organizational culture. Knowledge sharing is what separates great organizations from good ones and what can help ordinary workers become extraordinary.

Transferring knowledge has often presented logistical challenges in home health care, as service providers work independently scattered across communities. In recent years, VHA has been creating tools to connect our disparate staff and share information more efficiently and effectively. Our new digital learning strategy is the latest VHA initiative to use technology to support our staff to learn and optimize their performance.

Officially launched in November 2018, the strategy was in the works for the previous year.

"We started with a needs assessment," says Sasa Djumic, the VHA Clinical Educator who is leading this initiative. "Our consultant went to different home care companies and looked at things from a clinical

perspective, such as improving competency for nurses. Then we examined what we had in house to build a sustainability strategy for education here at VHA."

Digital learning at VHA encompasses online e-modules, videos and integrating electronic lessons in the classroom setting. "We want to make learning accessible to everyone," says Sasa. "But our strategy is more than just making new educational content available. It's also about making the most of the infrastructure we have. Our learning management system, for example, has valuable administrative capabilities that help support our decision

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- Sasa Djumic, VHA Clinical Educator

making. The system tells us statistics of who is using the materials, whether they are completing programs, how long it takes them, etc. It provides us detail that you wouldn't necessarily get from in-person sessions. Our digital learning tools help us better track our success and give us the flexibility to pivot when necessary," he adds.

