



Complex care, Simple comforts

care connection

The doctor behind the lens

Dr. Nowaczynski is as familiar with shutter click timing, platinum processing, and social documentary photo monographs as he is with symptoms of disease and medical interventions. On Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings, you will often find him behind his camera,



SELF PORTRAIT, Jan. 2002
In Mr. D's Bathroom.
© Mark Nowaczynski

photographing one of his patients in her or his own home. With the support of his wife and two children, (his 8 year old son is his very reliable and knowledgeable assistant), Dr. Nowaczynski is creating a photo documentary to illustrate the dire

need for better home care funding. He is inspired by the work of Lewis Hine, whose stark photos of working children helped change child labour policies in the U.S., and the photos of Dorothea Lange who caught on film the devastation wreaked by the Great Depression on rural families, helping the American public see the need for economic supports.

After completing a PhD in Physiology, a medical degree, and one year of an internal medicine residency, he switched to family

medicine. He discovered that he liked working with elderly patients. His group family practice, located at Yonge and Eglinton, attracts many seniors living in nearby apartments. "I would see them in the waiting room, exhausted from the effort of getting to my office." Dr. Nowaczynski began offering to go to patients' homes for follow-up appointments. 20% of Dr. Nowaczynski's practice is now housecalls. "The patients I take care of now couldn't get to my office or any other doctor's office. They would be nobody's patient. They would go in and out of emergency rooms or receive no care." Unexpectedly, his housecalls became a source of inspiration to him.

As a naturally visual person (in part because of dyslexia which rendered the printed word meaningless until grade three) and a long

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Eye on quality

The doctor behind the lens cont'd
 time amateur photographer, Dr. Nowaczynski sees beauty in the pathos of everyday life. In his housecall practice, Dr. Nowaczynski saw unforgettable, poignant images of people in very difficult circumstances. Seared into his memory is the image that greeted him when visiting a patient in the immediate aftermath of her husband's death at home. He found her weeping, splayed across her husband's body in the middle of the dining room.

When the funding cutbacks to homecare began, Dr. Nowaczynski saw first hand the impact of those cuts on his patients. But he realized that the struggles and stoicism of his patients were hidden from view. "No one sees them but me. What I was seeing was not something the public even knew about. I want to bring it to life in a dignified way through my photographs."

His photo documentary began in 1998 with another image that stayed with him of one of his patients, Ms. Doris A., who greets him each visit, sitting urgently upright on the edge of her couch with all of her necessities of life gathered around her. She is anxious, alert and stoic. (Despite her many needs, she was cut to one hour of home care per week.)

Another patient of Dr. Nowaczynski's, Mr. George W., with very complex health problems lost



Miss Doris A., Age 83, October 2000 © Mark Nowaczynski

all of his home care service hours. He called Dr. Nowaczynski crying. He could not manage. With Dr. Nowaczynski as his strong advocate, Mr. W's service hours were reinstated. He wanted to help publicize the need for home care and agreed to be photographed.

From those beginnings, Dr. Nowaczynski continued to work at his social documentary slowly for four years, upgrading his equipment for better visual detail. He despaired for some time, questioning whether his photos could really be of value to the debate on home care and to the welfare of his photo



Mrs. CASSANDRA W., Age 89, June 2002 © Mark Nowaczynski

subjects. However, when he showed a few of the images for the first time publicly, the response was enormous, generating a Globe & Mail feature piece and lots of public interest. "I am still amazed at the response the photos receive. They seem to strike a chord in people." Dr. Nowaczynski is pleased with the success of the photos so far and is encouraged to continue.

Partnership with VHA Home HealthCare

Dr. Nowaczynski now wants to expand his subjects beyond his own practice. "I'd like the photo documentary to reflect the diversity of Toronto and to demonstrate the need for better home care



MR. GEORGE W., Age 76, May 1998 © Mark Nowaczynski

funding beyond the limited area of my family practice." With clients from all areas of the GTA, VHA is uniquely positioned to assist Dr. Nowaczynski in his search for photo subjects. Says David Wright, President/CEO of VHA, "We believe in this project and in its ability to help motivate reform of the home care system. We are glad to help." ■

Making dreams come true

Homelessness and supportive housing featured at VHA's Annual General Meeting

Participants and guests at the 2002 VHA Home HealthCare AGM were moved by the real life stories of the Dream Team. No, not the U.S. Olympic all star basketball team but Toronto's own Dream Team; a group that organizes opportunities for people living with mental illness to speak to the community about the benefits of and pressing need for supportive housing. The speakers told their stories from the heart...how they lived before and after supportive housing...how their dreams came true. Here are two of the speakers' stories ...

Martin's Story

Martin Levine, labeled developmentally handicapped and institutionalized from childhood, was abused in the very institutions charged with his care and denied the dignity of a Bar Mitzvah. He fought for release from the institution, claiming he could live successfully in the community. After a long fight, he was released only to find himself hampered by workplace discrimination.

Martin eventually found his way with the help of supportive housing. He now lives with his wife in a seniors building and is a tireless housing advocate.

He also loves bowling and won't miss his league night.

Linda's Story

Linda Chamberlain was the "crazy woman" that people crossed the street to avoid. After dropping out of school at thirteen to help support her family, she then lost contact with them when she began to experience mental health difficulties requiring frequent hospitalizations. She ended up living on the street between hospitalizations and drinking to ease the pain of a lonely life without dignity, purpose or hope. Her life turned around when a psychiatrist helped her find permanent housing and a support program. Linda helped to create the Dream Team, sits on numerous committees, works part-time and is a dynamic, influential speaker on the issues of mental illness, homelessness and supportive housing. Her tremendous accomplishments were recently honoured by a 2002 "Courage to Come Back" award from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Foundation.

The Dream Team brought home to all those in attendance at the AGM the broad and dramatic change in peoples' lives that can be triggered by stable, supportive housing. In that spirit, the AGM celebrated VHA's own contribution to creating affordable, supportive housing through the opening of Adams House. (See story inside)

Adams House

A second chance at Adams House

Kirk, one of the first tenants to move into Adams House says, "Living here gives people a second chance in life." Samuel, Kirk's neighbour, says more supportive housing should be built just like this. "It's good for the people living there and it's good for the City."

Safe, affordable housing is in short supply in Toronto, especially for those living with severe mental illness. More and more people are forced to make do with streets, shelters, or rooming houses as their "home," and these places are more often than not unsafe, infested, and overcrowded environments. Evictions are on the rise, and waiting lists for social and supportive housing keep getting longer.

Adams House, a supportive housing complex located at 423-425 Sherbourne, opened its doors in July. The House, which can accommodate 27 tenants, is a joint venture of VHA Home HealthCare and COTA Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Mental Health Services. VHA's charitable funds purchased the property, and, along with grants to be received through two government programs (SCPI and RRAP*), paid for the extensive renovations to the hundred year old Victorian mansion. COTA staff are providing the on-going site support with funds from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's Mental Health Homelessness Initiative, and VHA is maintaining the facility.

Tenants come with a wide range of mental health problems and from a variety of untenable or unsustainable living situations, but they all have in common a desire for a better future and believe Adams House is a positive first step.

Kirk came to Adams House from a boarding home. As a health conscious sports fan and past and hopefully future athlete, Kirk felt that the boarding home was a hazard to his health. The food was unhealthy and the living conditions were not clean. His case manager agreed and

referred him to Adams House. Kirk is happy to be cooking for himself and, according to the staff, he makes great smelling curry stews. Kirk really enjoys his privacy, the cleanliness of the House (his own apartment is also spotless), and the landscaping. He thinks that with his new living space, he will be able to work toward his goals in sports and cooking. (He studied culinary management at George Brown College but was unable to finish the program at that time.)



Elaine, one of several women with apartments at Adams House, came directly from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's Queen Street facility. When asked what she likes about Adams House, she throws out her arms and yells, "Freedom!" She is exuberant, saying, "We have choices! We even recycle!" Elaine revels in her ability to come and go as she pleases, checking in with the staff on a casual basis. She enjoys her relationship with the staff, and finds them respectful and friendly. (Unfortunately, Elaine was not available for photographs.)



Samuel and Danny, another tenant, both think Adams House is all the better for having women tenants as well as men. Samuel thinks the house is more "harmonious" with a mixed group.



Samuel came from the all male Salvation Army hostel where he had been living for seven months. Hostel living is difficult. At Adams House, Samuel says, the same tenants are there week after week, people are friendly and the House is clean. Samuel is also excited about cooking for himself, especially making lasagna, his favourite dish. Samuel's sister in Toronto hasn't yet seen his new home, but, with a big smile, he says, "she will be so happy for me when she sees it."

Samuel talks openly about his illness, schizophrenia, and reports that he is managing it well. He hopes to go back to outdoor labour jobs, especially landscaping.



Danny

Danny is a soft-spoken thirteen year resident of Seaton House, a hostel for men. He liked Seaton House but found it difficult to cope with the transient population. He says the tenants at Seaton House changed all the time and brought with them to the shelter their own set of problems. After years of factory work followed by life at Seaton House, Danny likes the quiet and the stability of Adams House. The house rules are good, Danny says, because they maintain a quiet and safe atmosphere. With no family to support him, Danny especially appreciates the staff assistance with his medications, his messages and appointments.

COTA staff are confident that the House will continue to be a healthy and safe environment with the great group of tenants living there. The staff feel good about the positive impact Adams House has on the tenants. Kerri, one of COTA's site staff, explains that looking for work and pursuing hobbies and interests is impossible when there is no fixed place to be contacted by potential employers, no place to clean yourself or to safely leave your things. "The tenants really appreciate having a lock on their apartment doors." She described one tenant who began working only a month after his arrival and another tenant, an amateur artist, who is thrilled to be able to paint in his room.

Everyone needs a safe place to call home. Adams House is such a home and a place for second chances in life. Stay tuned to www.vha.ca for details on our public launch and official naming ceremony. The complex will be named Adams House after its first owners, James and Eunice Adams. In the meantime, donations of gently used furniture (sofas, tables and chairs, and one VCR) for the common areas would be greatly appreciated. Please contact COTA on site at (416) 926-9915. (COTA would also love to hear from anyone with a truck who could help with furniture pick-ups.)

*SCPI - Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative.
RRAP - Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program.



Offering complex care and simple comforts since 1925

VHA SERVICES

- ✓ Adult and Elder Care
- ✓ Child and Family Care
- ✓ Respite or Caregiver/Family Relief
- ✓ Palliative Care
- ✓ Mental Health Support
- ✓ Extreme Cleaning
- ✓ Foot Care
- ✓ Attendant Care
- ✓ Information and Referral Services

VHA PROFESSIONAL STAFF

- ✓ Registered nurses/registered practical nurses
- ✓ Homemakers/personal support workers
- ✓ Client service coordinators/supervisors
- ✓ Other skilled professionals as required

VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of the United Way of Greater Toronto and a contracted provider for all six Toronto Community Care Access Centres, the Durham Access to Care, the City of Toronto's Homemakers and Nurses Services Program and the Regional Municipality of Durham.

All services can be made available in your own home, in hospital or in a long-term care facility.



For more information, please call us at

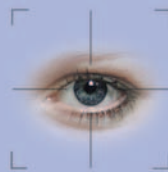
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or visit our web site at www.vha.ca



United Way
of Greater Toronto



Eye On QUALITY

Quality Improvement is always in focus at VHA Home HealthCare

Recent achievements and activities include:

- Adding a Quality Improvement Associate to our staff in January 2002;
- Reviewing our Risk Management Program to identify and address any gaps;
- Preparing for our second accreditation survey by the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation, scheduled for September 2003; and
- Surveying our clients, referral sources, funders and other stakeholders regarding:
 - the effectiveness of our governing Board;
 - a new automated telephone system;
 - services in Durham Region through Durham Access to Care and services in North York through the North York CCAC; and
 - the Extreme Cleaning Program.

These surveys provide valuable feedback on what we do well and where opportunities for improvement exist.

The commitment and the remarkable efforts of our staff lead to quality improvements that make a real difference to our clients and their families.

For more information about any of our quality initiatives, please contact Gloria Kay at (416) 482-8772 or e-mail: gkay@vha.ca



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