



Complex care, Simple comforts

# COMMUNITY care connection

## Living our Values



Experts have diverse opinions on how to make a “good” organization “great.” One

thing they all seem to agree on though is the fact that great organizations go beyond paying lip service to their mission and values and are prepared to “walk the talk.” They ensure that their objectives are in line with their values and then take the necessary steps — no matter how daunting, challenging or grueling — to make them a reality. In essence, great organizations do more than preach values: they’re prepared to follow through with the hard work to live them.

This belief is something we take to heart at VHA. While the many projects we’re working on vary in size, scope, and the people directly involved, they’re all integral to our mission: *making a positive impact on every life we touch by providing complex care and simple comforts.*

It seems wherever you go these days, there’s talk of what organizations have done wrong to create the current ‘doom and gloom’ scenario that we’re living through. But instead of focusing on all the negative stories swirling around, we at VHA thought this was the perfect opportunity to explore some of the things our humble not-for-profit organization is doing right — or

more specifically, how a sampling of the projects, initiatives and ideas we’ve begun or are continuing to work on are coalescing to maintain and build our reputation as a leader in the home health-care industry in Ontario.

Carol Annett  
CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare

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*Client-Focused*

## Empowering Employees Keeps Focus on Clients

Scheduling appointments, meeting, caring, sharing and most importantly *listening* to the wants and needs of the people we assist: these are just a few of the actions involved in delivering top-quality, client-centred care. While VHA's focus is firmly fixed on the clients we serve, empowering our employees with the tools and support to provide extraordinary care is integral to this process. The earmarking of funds for two new projects — *The Simple Comforts Fund* and the *Ideas to Action Fund* — will provide VHA employees with the means to deliver on this commitment and help make clients' lives a little easier.

*The Simple Comforts Fund* allows VHA staff to pay for an urgent item or service for a client when they have no where else to turn. This could include anything from new eyeglasses to replace a lost or broken pair; a fan during a heat wave; or even food, should the VHA worker discover an empty refrigerator. Thanks to a near-doubling of the budget to just under half a million dollars, VHA can help clients pay for and receive their most crucial needs right away. "*The Simple Comforts Fund* gives our frontline workers the power to make a

decision to help a client on the spot," notes Chief Nursing Officer and VP Client Services, Deborah Simon. "The fact that no approval from higher-ups is needed for items under \$100 means they can fill the client need quickly and efficiently."

The *Ideas to Action Fund* does just that — it turns great ideas into a reality and promotes innovation within the organization. Staff can submit a request for the funding of new programs, services, or research ideas for VHA to initiate or take part in. This could include conducting relevant research or participating in new charitable causes and gives VHA employees the opportunity to get directly involved with the growth and progression of the long-term and home health-care community.

According to Simon, both funds have generated a lot of buzz and excitement because they give employees the power to directly improve the lives of clients and VHA; "Ultimately we believe these funds will help us provide more responsive services to clients, and make VHA a better, stronger and more innovative organization."

*Continuous  
Quality Improvement*

## Partnership Improves Patient Safety



Creating a safe environment for patients is the foundation of industry best practices and one of VHA's mandates. Though processes are strictly followed to ensure client safety, open communication with other health-related agencies is equally critical — especially when patients are transferring between care providers, such as a move from hospital to home health care.

It's during these transfers when gaps can happen, resulting in dose duplication, overlap or other issues that may impact patient health. VHA is paving the way in standardizing the medication reconciliation process to improve patient safety within Canada by helping to pilot a Medical Risk Assessment Tool (known as 'MedRAT') on new or transfer patients — a project which emerged from *Safer Health Care Now* and *Quality Health Now* initiatives.

Our nurses have teamed up with a Shopper's Drug Mart research pharmacist (among others) to pilot an information-sharing program to identify potential medication issues and remedies drug discrepancies. Clients answer a series of

questions about their risk factors — including questions related to cognition challenges, literacy issues, side effects or lack of support. If they answer "yes" to two or more identified risks, the Best Possible Medication History (BPMH) tool is employed. BPMH is also used on clients who take "high-risk" medication, such as insulin or heparin.

"It's amazing what a simple conversation with the client can unearth," says VHA Clinical Practical Specialist and project lead, Colleen Kearney. "A home health-care nurse might ask the patient to collect all their medications and go over them together. Often patients are taking expired medicine, or overlapping use of medicines unnecessarily." BPMH allows nurses to identify clients at higher risk for medication issues and avoid future discrepancies through a consistent system. Nurses involved in the project (also co-chaired by VON) participate in monthly national teleconferences to review results, share information and refine the process.

The MedRAT pilot will continue into summer 2009. Once completed, project tools from MedRAT will replace VHA's current medication reconciliation process, ensuring a more fluid seamless system for new and transfer patients within Ontario.

*Comments  
or Suggestions?*

Contact the editor of

COMMUNITY  
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Pam Stoikopoulos

at 416.489.2500 x.4344 or 1.888.314.6622

e-mail: [pstoik@vha.ca](mailto:pstoik@vha.ca)

## We Welcome Your Support

### MEMBERSHIP

VHA welcomes new members and encourages people of the communities we serve to participate in VHA's governance. VHA members are entitled to vote at our Annual General Meeting and are provided with ongoing information about operations and Ontario home care issues. VHA members may also participate in the work of our board and/or its committees. There is a membership fee of \$25.00 (which can be waived in special circumstances). For more information please contact Patricia Triantafyllou at 416-482-4617 or [patricia@vha.ca](mailto:patricia@vha.ca)

### DONATIONS

Charitable donations to VHA Home HealthCare make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in need of care and support in your community. Donations are welcome by mail, over the phone (credit card contributions) or in person. You may also want to make a "tribute gift" in honour of a loved one. To our 2008 donors, our sincere thanks for your generosity.

# Bringing PSWs Together for Better Care

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) are the lifeblood of the home care and long-term care community, tirelessly assisting clients with daily tasks including bathing and other personal care, homemaking and meal preparation. They also provide companionship and comfort to those in need. And while they're experts in *giving* support, there aren't always a lot of resources PSWs can tap into to *receive* help, often working in isolation away from colleagues and experts in the field.

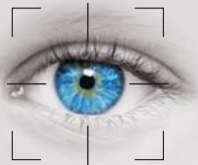
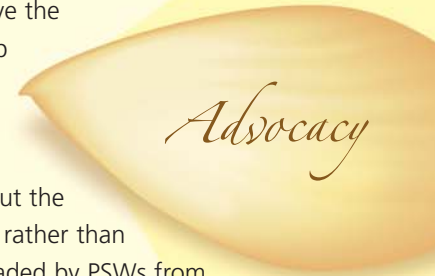
This reality is changing with the launch of a unique new Community of Practice (CoP) for Personal Support Workers. Funded by the Seniors Health Research Transfer Network through the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, a CoP draws people with common interests together to learn from each other, experts, and research. CoPs can also help inform policy-makers and researchers about industry-specific issues. "Support for Personal Support Workers

is a really exciting project," says Joy Klopp, VHA Director of Contracts, Quality and Performance Management and one of the PSW CoP's original developers. "It gives Ontario PSWs caring for seniors new tools and greater access to resources, allowing them to connect with each other by phone and online. It also gives PSWs learning exchange opportunities with experts in seniors' health and care...both at no cost." VHA, for example, shared its expertise and provided learning opportunities in client-centred care and ethics to CoP members.

"We hope this Community of Practice gives PSWs a supportive network and the tools they need to do the best job possible and gives a clearer voice to important issues facing seniors and those who care for them," notes Klopp. This kind of open dialogue and information exchange creates a win-win scenario that advocates for elderly clients and PSW needs with policy-makers, researchers and educators."

In its first eight months, *Support for Personal Support Workers* has attracted over 200 members. Though VHA initially led the CoP, it asked the Personal Support Network of Ontario to take over the lead this spring. "We wanted to get it started, but believe the leadership needs to be with PSWs throughout the province, rather than being headed by PSWs from one organization," says Klopp. "We are working with PSNO in the transition and will remain actively involved in supporting the CoP and its activities."

For more information on the *Support for Personal Support Workers Community of Practice*, contact Joy Klopp at [pswcoP@vha.ca](mailto:pswcoP@vha.ca) or 416-489-2500 ext. 4783



## EYE ON QUALITY

2008 saw a lot of activity in quality and risk management at VHA. We worked tirelessly to develop a Quality Plan and Risk Management Plan and to achieve our objectives.

Our accomplishments included surveying a more complete sampling of clients across service areas with very encouraging results: of 850 clients surveyed, 96 per cent said they would recommend VHA services to others.

The development and implementation of our Patient Safety Improvement Plan helped us focus on activities,

training and education to foster a more 'just and trusting' culture where safety issues are fully reported and openly discussed. This shift in culture is critical to understanding, addressing and remaining focused on relevant safety issues to enhance our quality of client care.

The year ahead is ripe with exciting new challenges, especially as we work towards re-accreditation (November 2009) by Accreditation Canada. The process is well under way as staff completed various self-assessment surveys as part of the new

Qmentum Program which helps to gauge employees' perceptions of how well VHA is doing in meeting national standards of excellence. These surveys relate to standards for:

- Home care (both in nursing and personal support/community support)
- Medication management
- Infection control
- Effective leadership
- Board governance
- Patient safety culture
- Work life

Though we're still in the early stages of interpreting data collected, this information will be critical to our planning process, helping to establish priorities and shape our agenda as we move through another exciting year.

# Taking Healthier Steps

When temperatures dip below zero, the roads and sidewalks are often hazardous for both drivers and pedestrians. Despite the treacherous conditions, VHA's Nurses and Personal Support Workers (PSWs) are still out in the community providing clients with comfort and care. During these times, the daily commute of VHA field staff can be extremely dangerous.

According to Bill Poole, VHA's Healthy Workplace Associate, slips, trips and falls are the most common causes of on-the-job injuries to workers delivering care in the field, especially during the winter months. These injuries can result in staff losing significant amounts of time from work and can be costly to the organization in terms of lost productivity. As a company that's continually looking

to improve working conditions for employees, the Human Resources Department and its Health and Safety Division saw this as a great opportunity for VHA to implement a simple but effective safety solution to prevent field staff from slipping on the ice and snow.

"We considered several options," notes Bill, referring to consultations with Kelley Myers, VP of Human Resources, "and when it came to practicality and usefulness settled on the Due North Everyday Traction Aids for a pilot that provides PSWs with a pair of the traction aids at no cost to them. We're hoping they will eventually be used by all VHA field staff."

The heel straps, which are attached to the bottom of shoes, have a spike

pattern that resembles those on golf or soccer shoes. They are compact, easily stored and suitable for winter temperatures and snowy, icy conditions. The traction aids are versatile and can be worn with a variety of footwear so the wearer doesn't have to compromise comfort for safety.

"We've had lots of interest and positive feedback," Bill notes. Over a third of field staff has taken advantage of VHA's offer to foot the bill for the spikes. "Once workers try them, they really love them. When you look at the big picture, it's really a small price to pay to ensure a safer work environment and workforce."

## Continuing Community Connections

VHA's rich history and solid reputation are based on client-centred care and on our outreach within the community. So when the opportunity arose to join forces to assist seniors living in supportive housing in Toronto, VHA jumped at the chance to provide nursing services.

Funded by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's *Aging at Home Strategy*, this project is lead by St. Clair West Healthcare Centre and supported

by Toronto Public Housing, West Park Healthcare Centre (who is providing mental health services), and VHA's nursing staff. The initiative helps residents in one of four supportive housing units live independently despite challenges such as chronic disease or mental health concerns.

Clients often deal with multiple challenges, including conditions such as depression, hoarding or agoraphobia, notes Caroline Hunter, VHA's Manager of Client Services, so building trust is integral to delivering care; "Our partners and nurses focus on creating positive relationships with these clients and their community. Many haven't seen a doctor in years, so developing trust is often integral to getting the health support services needed."

These collaborations are an important part of VHA's mandate and reputation. "We're not only known as a great community leader, we're also perceived as a team player," she notes, referring to a recent survey of 22 VHA community partners which unanimously rated VHA positively (65 per cent as "excellent" and 35 per cent as "good") on "*co-operation with community and stakeholders*."

Though VHA prides itself in taking the lead in home health care, it also embraces the opportunity to collaborate with others says Hunter. "These partnerships are integral to providing effective and comprehensive care — and that's really what VHA is all about."



## 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
- ✓ Foot Care
- ✓ Attendant Care
- ✓ Extreme Cleaning
- ✓ Information and Referral Services
- ✓ Supplementary Staffing in Care Facilities
- ✓ Supportive Housing

### VHA PROFESSIONAL STAFF

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

VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of the United Way Toronto and a contracted provider with Toronto Central, Central, Central East, Central West, and Erie St. Clair CCACs, 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 **416.489.2500** or **1.888.314.6622** or visit our web site at [www.vha.ca](http://www.vha.ca)



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VHA HOME HEALTHCARE  
477 Mt. Pleasant Rd., Suite 500  
Toronto, Ontario M4S 2L9

