



# Caring for Generations

Carol Annett ~ CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare



**S**pring is a time of renewal and reflection. A season where you pull out those dusty old shoeboxes in the corner of your closet and pour over old photos; clippings and personal notes that moved you enough to hold on to them over the years.

We've been doing much of this at VHA Home HealthCare as of late—in fact we're blessed with 85 years worth of "shoeboxes" that remind us of our rich and dynamic history. Archives filled with incredible pictures from as far back as the 1920s and fascinating essays on our founder Barbara Blackstock Cody—whose vision and values shaped the organization and whose impact continues to be felt. We thought we'd give you a taste of our own reminiscing by sharing select archival material with you and by giving you a glimpse into the life of Barbara Blackstock Cody. Our "archival dig" also uncovered forgotten stories from decades ago that were published in the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail and even Chatelaine magazine about VHA initiatives that were "cutting edge" at the time.

In this edition VHA's own Jose Medeiros talks about advance care planning—a critical task of client-centred care. It's also

a "hot topic" for a panel discussion and reception we're set to host on June 7, 2010—so please consider this your invitation to attend!

If you hadn't noticed, VHA is also working hard to remain current with a new look and a shift to publishing Community Care Connection quarterly, so we can connect with you more often and bring you important updates on VHA projects and collaborations within the communities we serve.

Eighty five years is a ripe old age we're proud to have arrived at. What's truly amazing though is that VHA and the services we provide are more relevant and necessary than ever. We hope to continue our important work for another 85 years—generating a vibrant history future generations will marvel at as they sift through the stories, scrapbooks and memories we're creating at this moment in time.

## We welcome your support!

### Membership

VHA welcomes new associate members and encourages people in the community to get involved with VHA. Our membership fee of \$25 can be waived in special circumstances. Please contact Patricia Triantafilou at 416.489.2500 or patricia@vha.ca.

### Donations

Charitable donations to VHA Home HealthCare make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in need. Donations are welcome online, by mail, phone or in person. Our sincerest thanks for your generosity.

Newsletter brought to you by



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*“..We all learned from her that a lady is someone who gets on her hands and knees and scrubs the floor, someone who does whatever she is doing well.”*

– Sheila Connell, Barbara’s niece.

VHA’s celebrated founder was many things: a maternal feminist, a beloved aunt, a loving wife and an immensely important social reform figure in Toronto. As woman from a well-to-do family in the early twentieth century, Barbara Blackstock Cody challenged many of the social limits of her time.

Her first exposure to the charitable life was with her grandfather George Gooderham of Gooderham and Worts. Besides making generous donations to the Toronto General Hospital, he liked to regularly visit patients with Barbara. This may have given her that first sense of duty and a greater understanding of her privileged life. Her awareness only increased after a monumental drive across India with her sister and aunt—the first women ever to drive across the country. Barbara also grew up surrounded by other socially-conscious family members including a great aunt who was one of the founders of the National Council of Women and the Women’s College Hospital.

Despite her long and successful career, as a cloistered Victorian girl, Barbara wasn’t able to attend school—which was said to be her greatest regret in life. It wasn’t until Barbara, stuck in England because of the travel restrictions of WWI, found her calling as

## Celebrating 85 Years

Who was Barbara Blackstock Cody?



a wartime nurse. She had an obvious gift for nursing and was recommended to attend the London Hospital for further training. Ironically, the war proved to be a liberating experience for Barbara and she came to the realization that she could no longer be satisfied living the narrow and confined life expected of her. Her quest for education continued when Barbara returned to Canada and graduated from the first Public Health Nursing class at the University of Toronto in 1921.

As a young nurse, she cared for the Toronto east side by completing her rounds on a bicycle. She couldn’t be stopped despite the fact that nursing wasn’t considered a respected profession for girls from upper class families. She pedaled on and in her extraordinary career served as President of the Florence Nightingale International Fund, Secretary of the Infant Home, Founding President of Visiting Homemakers Association, Chairman of the Child Welfare Council in Toronto, Executive Member of the National Council of Women in Canada, Vice-President of the Local Council of Women and was awarded an Ontario Medal for Good Citizenship in 1977.

At 41 she married Dr. Canon Cody, an old family friend and president of the University of Toronto



from 1932-1944. Together they became a formidable philanthropic couple in Toronto.

Barbara served as VHA's President for 35 years, until the age of 68 and remained involved with the agency—even using VHA services herself until her death. As a testament to her strong-will and dedication, Barbara kept driving for years and years and years when, to the horror of her family, she just kept passing those driving tests.

Barbara passed away on September 2, 1980 at 88 years old after a full life deeply committed to public health and welfare. She managed to step outside of her background and used her natural talent and ability to make a significant change in the lives of many. Barbara Blackstock was a true ambassador of everything we continue to strive for as an organization today: she is our respected foremother and visionary.

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*Information and quotes collected from the essay: Barbara Blackstock/Cody: Social Welfare Reformer, by Carole Sander, 1986.*

## VHA Home HealthCare Roaring 20s to the New Millennium



**V**HA Home HealthCare has a long and exciting history of helping those in need. VHA's programs now cover a range of health needs from pre-birth to end of-life care and every stage in between. A sampling of our milestones over the past 85 years shows just how far we've come.

**1925** • The **Visiting Housekeepers Centre** is founded by Barbara Blackstock Cody to provide homemaking services to families with an ill mother. Launching with only 14 housekeepers, this is the first service in Canada to bring trained, supervised workers into homes experiencing crisis from a critical illness.

**1929** • The **Visiting Homemakers Association** (VHA) becomes an independent agency and Blackstock is elected president.

**1937** • VHA initiates parental relief for polio victims.

**1951** • Homemaker services extended to care for sick children of single working mothers.

**1964** • After a three year pilot project, VHA services begin to include care for the elderly.

**1969** • VHA moves to building donated by the **W. Garfield Weston Foundation**.

**1974** • The **Parental Relief Program**, financed by United Community fund, offers homemaking to families where the mother has a disability or one-parent families where the father has a physical disability.

**1981-1985** • Demand for homemakers and provincial support increases so that by 1985, VHA provides 355,000 hours of service.

**1998** • Nursing programs added to list of services to offer our clients a broader spectrum of home health care.

**2000** • **Extreme Cleaning Program** developed to help people suffering from mental health challenges facing eviction because of unsanitary living conditions.

**2001-2002** • Our name is officially changed from Visiting Homemakers Association to **VHA Home HealthCare** to reflect the growing range of services. In partnership with **COTA Health**, VHA opens *Adams House*, a supportive housing complex for tenants with severe mental illness.

**2005** • VHA launches the **Heroes in the Home** award to recognize family members and friends who provide extraordinary home care to loved ones.

**2009** • The VHA family grows when COTA Health's Rehabilitation Services—offering physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, social work and dietetics—joins as **VHA Rehab Solutions**.

**2010** • VHA Home HealthCare celebrates its 85<sup>th</sup> year of providing community health services. Today we have over 1,600 workers supporting those in need of complex care and simple comforts.

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# Advance Care Planning

**A**s a Social Worker and Manager of Private Services at VHA Home HealthCare, Jose Medeiros has become an advocate for advance care planning and its relevance in delivering care that is truly client-centred. Jose discusses his perspective on advance care planning and the barriers that continue to challenge patients, families and health professionals alike.



## What is advance care planning and what does it involve?

An advance care plan is a written or verbal instruction made by a person while he or she is still capable. It describes the kind of care the person would want should they one day not be able to communicate their care wishes for themselves. The process is integrated, focused and organized so that the person has a chance to understand, reflect upon and discuss their goals, values and beliefs—both with loved ones and health care workers—so they make the most informed health care decisions now and down the line.

## Advance care planning is not a new concept, so why is it so important now?

What tends to happen now is intervention by default; i.e., when in doubt, do everything. This can lead to further emotional, physical and spiritual distress if it is not what the patient wanted. An aging population and technological advances allow patients to live longer and longer—though not necessarily better. The result is a kind of “perfect storm” where patients simply “go along” with the system and feel powerless to determine their own care. Sure, they may have an extended life, but—without an advance care plan—it may cost them their comfort and overall happiness in the process.

An advance care plan helps patients feel in control of the decision-making process, lessens the burden on loved ones and improves understanding between health care professionals, patients and families. In essence, it opens the door to important conversations and prepares everyone for patients’ last stages of life.

## What are some of the barriers?

I really see the main barrier to advance care planning being people’s own discomfort with the issue—be it patients, families or the health care team. People are

hesitant to talk about “the unspeakable:” death and the process of dying.

And therein lies the biggest misconception: that advance care planning is only for people who are in the final stages of life. The reality is that many patients do not fit the label of “dying” as they are living for years with chronic, progressive diseases. Advance care planning is as much about how patients want to live and be cared for as it is about how to die.

There are also systemic challenges: from an over-emphasis on interventions (rather than changing health states), to payment systems that reward acute care and gaps in care co-ordination.



## What needs to change to encourage and embrace these types of conversations?

There is growing evidence that families and people living with chronic, progressive and debilitating illnesses want to talk about care wishes/preferences when respectfully engaged by skilled advance care planning facilitators.

Unfortunately, the health care system lacks the organization, co-ordination and trained staff to engage patients, families and the community at large in meaningful discussions about advance care planning. This needs to change if the system is serious about understanding and honouring the wishes of patients and ensuring truly informed decision-making.

# Eye on Quality

## Sustaining Momentum in Quality Improvement

**O**ur 2009 Accreditation Canada Momentum survey was very successful with VHA meeting all of Accreditation Canada's standards and criteria.

But quality improvement is a continuous effort, so we're not resting on our laurels and instead continuing to build on the momentum we created preparing for the survey. Some of our 2010 quality improvement initiatives include enhancing:

*Surveying of VHA's clients* using Ipsos Reid, the same surveyors used by our CCAC partners. The new surveys begin this summer, providing a more robust survey system and findings to help us improve our clients' experiences with our services. It also allows for provincial and regional benchmarking of our performance which is critical to our improvement efforts.

*The client experience at VHA.* It's the focus of a number of ongoing working groups that address issues raised in client surveys, such as timeliness and thoroughness of care.

*Performance monitoring and accountability systems* to highlight our performance results to team, manager, supervisor and individual field staff levels. This "report card-style" feedback can be compared across teams and staff and prompts the sharing of success strategies, encouraging a quality improvement focus at every level of the organization.

*Client and staff safety at VHA* with the roll out of a number of initiatives such as enhanced training materials for use with clients, organization-wide training on S-BAR, a technique to improve communication, and Safe Start, a straight-forward program to raise staff awareness of factors influencing safety at work and at home.

cont'd **Advance Care Planning**

### Want to learn more on Advance Care Planning?

Join us for *Righting the Last Act:*

*Empowering Patients to Script Care Choices*

- June 7, 2010 3:30-4:30 p.m, reception to follow
- 477 Mt. Pleasant Suite 500

Confirmed panelists include:

- Dr. Karen Faith, Bioethicist, Consultant and Educator
- Jose Medeiros, VHA Home HealthCare
- Dr. James Meuser, U of T, Family & Community Medicine
- Judith Wahl, Advocacy Centre for the Elderly (ACE)

Contact Patricia at 416.482.4617 or [ptrian@vha.ca](mailto:ptrian@vha.ca) to register.



**Comments or Suggestions?** Contact the editor of Community Care Connection  
**Pam Stoikopoulos** : 416.489.2500 x4344 or 1.888.314.6622 email: [pstoik@vha.ca](mailto:pstoik@vha.ca)



# Offering complex care and simple comforts since 1925

*All of our services are available in your own home, at school, in hospital or in a long-term care facility.*

## 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
- Consultation and Education



A United Way member agency

## VHA PROFESSIONAL STAFF/SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Dietitians
- Occupational Therapists
- Personal Support Workers/Homemakers
- Physiotherapists
- Registered Nurses/Registered Practical Nurses
- Social Workers
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Client Service Coordinators/Supervisors
- Other Skilled Professionals as Required



VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of United Way Toronto and a contracted provider with Toronto Central, Central, Central East, Central West, South West, Mississauga Halton, Champlain, and Erie St. Clair CCACs, the City of Toronto's Homemakers and Nurses Services program and the Regional Municipality of Durham.



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