

Forecasting a Hot Summer for VHA

Carol Annett ~ CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare

Summer is a time for relaxing and slowing down for some organizations, but for VHA, it's a hotbed of activity as we wrap up a number of activities and gear up for the busy fall season.



This issue clearly shows just how much we've been up to of late—especially in the month of June. The month kicked off with VHA's work on hoarding back in the professional spotlight as co-sponsors with Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre for a one-day intensive hoarding symposium called **Help for Tenants Who Hoard: Balancing Rights and Safety**. The packed house demonstrated a clear need for information-sharing amongst community workers on the issue and VHA looks forward to continuing its leadership role on this topic.

Following VHA's Annual General Meeting on June 11, we also held our **2012 Heart of Home Care Award** presentation. This year's winners—Jean Gervais and Ken Wong—were undoubtedly some of the most inspiring and memorable caregivers we've met and their incredibly touching stories left much of the audience openly weeping.

The intensity of these stories, however, was balanced out by a warm and often hysterical "opening act" from Canada's own "Patch Adams," Dr. Geordie Fallis, head of Family Medicine at Toronto East General Hospital. His presentation had everyone in stitches without diminishing the poignancy of



Dr. Geordie Fallis and Carol Annett.

his underlying message: that the medical system can't always heal, but with compassion and humour, it can comfort. Many thanks also to Standard Life and Teak Printing Inc. for their generous sponsorship of the event.

June marked our participation—both as presenters and booth hosts—at the 2012 Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres' Conference in Toronto. It was a great opportunity to reconnect with many of you and forge new relationships too. Hopefully, if you attended, you had a chance to reap the benefits of a VHAaaahhh Spa massage!

Community outreach is also on the upswing as we happily learned that our Chatham team received TransCanada funding to set up blood pressure clinics and perform in-home foot care on Walpole Island First Nations Reserve. This is VHA's second year of funding for this program designed to help reduce the incidence of heart disease and diabetes in a region known to have the highest risks for these diseases in Ontario.

Though we've hardly had a chance to catch our collective breath after an action-packed spring, we're already busy working on a number of exciting initiatives for the summer and fall including the launch of our Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) candidacy in August and accreditation in early November—the first consolidated accreditation survey with rehabilitation services. The process is challenging but exciting and gives us a clear picture of the effectiveness of our processes, the quality of VHA's client care and our strengths as an employer. I look forward to sharing our "summer harvest" with you in our fall edition. Meantime, here's to an exciting, dynamic and memorable summer season!

Newsletter brought to you by



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Everyday Heroes of Home Care

VHA's Heart of Home Care Award Winners

For the past eight years, VHA has recognized the outstanding efforts of family caregivers with our Heart of Home Care Award. It's a small way to say “thank you” to all caregivers for the crucial support and devotion they provide to family members, the community and greater society and a way to draw attention to the need for greater supports.

This year's winners, **Ken Wong of Markham** and **Jean Gervais of Scarborough**, embody the dedication of caregivers everywhere. “Their stories are heartbreaking, compelling and inspiring all rolled into one,” notes President and CEO of VHA, Carol Annett. “The daily compassion, strength and dedication Ken and Jean show is nothing short of incredible and reminds us that caregiving is a demanding job with lots of challenges that aren't often acknowledged by the outside world. They are true inspirations.”

Love Conquers All

Ken and Nada's sweeping romance begins in university with an enthusiastic engineering student (Ken), and a bright eyed business major (Nada) meeting at a party. Instantly smitten by the vibrant young woman before him, Ken had to have Nada's phone number. Nada, knowing the dubious reputation of engineering students, gave Ken the number of a pizza place. Fortunately, a mutual friend intervened and let Nada know that Ken was anything but typical. Swayed by her friend's praise, Nada gave young Ken a chance and their relationship blossomed into a long-term commitment and eventually marriage.



Heart of Home Care Award winner Ken Wong (centre in black jacket) with supporters who nominated him.

Their “happily ever after” included successful careers and two beautiful twin girls. But sadly life doesn't always work out as planned. Four years ago, at the age of 46, Ken noticed some significant changes in Nada. She was leaving post-it notes all over the house and wasn't able to do everyday tasks like banking. Finally, Nada was diagnosed with *corticobasal syndrome*, a neurodegenerative dementia that causes loss of language and frontal executive functions. Nada's shock and devastation at the diagnosis was met with Ken's compassion and commitment: he promised he'd never leave her side and would always take care of her, putting his engineering career on hold to do so. Sadly Nada deteriorated quickly and within six months of her diagnosis, she could no longer speak.



Nada Wong,
Ken's wife.

The effects of the syndrome are beyond challenging: Nada will sometimes scream and shout for hours at a time. Though Ken gets 20 hours a week of home care from the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), the workers often can't handle Nada's behaviour and so Ken finds himself supporting Nada 24 hours a day, seven days a week. “It can sometimes be a lonely job,” he says. “It's hard to get help—I'm really on my own.” Despite the hardships Ken remains positive, “There are things that keep me going. I feel good about overcoming certain challenges and that I am able to do this. I want to celebrate her life together, with no regrets, with whatever time she has left and support her through her final journey,” says Ken who adds that Nada has been given two to 10 years left to live.

Aside from feeding, dressing, washing and changing Nada, Ken also tries to stimulate her mind with objects and stories from their past. One thing that keeps Ken going is that he believes Nada's long-term memory is

still intact. “She laughs when I talk to her about funny things from our early years,” says Ken. “I can see the twinkle in her eyes.”

Though the job is lonely, his compassionate care hasn’t gone unnoticed: an astounding **nine people** nominated Ken for the Heart of Home Care Award, each detailing his challenging and exhausting role as a caregiver as well as his unwavering strength, love and patience in caring for Nada.

But Ken’s generous nature extends beyond Nada. When he steals a few moments for himself he advocates on behalf of caregivers, eager to share his experiences with others. “As a society, we need to ask ourselves, *to care or not care? What values or moral compass do we want to live by?* If we each help one person,” Ken adds, “the world would be a better place.”

“I made a promise to Nada of for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part,” says Ken and, though he had no idea at the time the challenges this commitment would entail, he has kept his word.

A Mother’s Love

Jean Gervais’ son Michael was an athletic and happy 22-year-old, who aspired to be part of the Olympic high jump team. But his dream was shattered by a severe car accident in 1974 that left Michael in a coma for nine months, partially paralyzed and brain damaged. As a loyal and devoted mom, Jean naturally became Michael’s primary caregiver. “He wasn’t too bad then, he could walk with a quad cane and he could speak,” says Jean.

Michael was in desperate need of rehabilitation services. The doctors, however, thought otherwise, deciding he was an inappropriate candidate. But Jean’s feisty resolve couldn’t be ignored and her persistent advocacy ensured Michael’s eventual acceptance into a rehabilitation facility.

Michael worked hard, made great strides and regained some mobility. Despite his progress, he remained in a wheelchair and would always require 24/7 care.

Unfortunately, 18 years after the accident, Michael and Jean faced another devastating setback: Michael was diagnosed with brain cancer. With treatment the cancer went into remission, but the battle left him bedridden. Despite all of these challenges, her age (Jean



Winner Jean Gervais.

is now 86) and her own recent fight with leukemia, Jean insists on keeping Michael at home. “He is a good patient and I think that’s why I’ve been able to handle it for so long,” Jean says. Jean has even found a doctor who visits Michael at home on a monthly basis. Although Jean now gets more home care support since she’s been diagnosed with leukemia, it’s only for two hours daily.

Though the challenges Jean faces are numerous and heartbreaking, she doesn’t complain. “I’ve never seen my aunt get short-tempered, angry or frustrated,” says Sharon Edge, Jean’s niece and the person who nominated her for the award. “She lives for him and he lives for her.”

Ken and Jean are both extraordinary people who are caregivers not because they have to be, but because they believe home is the best place for their loved ones to live with dignity, comfort and independence. VHA’s Heart of Home Care Award winners this year celebrate the incredible dedication, love and positivity they bring to their care and to the lives of the people around them. “We hope that these stories and this award shed a brighter light on family caregivers,” says Carol Annett. “They should not only be acknowledged for the great work they do, but supported—by their families, the system and society as a whole. After all, these caregivers are truly the glue that holds the health care system and the lives of the people they care for together.”

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Breaking News and Updates



VHA and Sunnybrook Focus on Hoarding Challenges

This past June, Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre and VHA Home HealthCare (VHA) played host to a hoarding conference at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre's McLaughlin Auditorium.

The near sold-out conference brought more than 200 community service providers, CCAC case managers, housing staff, mental health workers, public health nurses and rehab therapists together to share the latest information and ideas on this growing community challenge. The day featured presentations from Dr. Peggy Richter, Director at Sunnybrook's Clinic for OCD and Related Disorders and Catherine Chater, an Occupational Therapist at VHA and author of *The Community Clutter and Hoarding Toolkit*. Representatives from EMS, Toronto's Fire Department, Legal Aid and the Human Rights Commission were also on hand to share their perspectives. Proceeds from the conference will support the work of the Toronto's Response to Hoarding Coalition. Thanks to all those that came out for this fascinating day. Clearly there is much work that still needs to be done.

Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) Kick Off

Intensive planning is underway as VHA prepares to launch its Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) Best Practice Spotlight Organization (BPSO) Candidacy journey in August with an RNAO Champion's Workshop at our head office.

Kicking off this incredible initiative is VHA's Durham office whose staff will lead the way in piloting RNAO's Assessment and Management of Stage I to IV Pressure Ulcers Best Practice Guideline (BPG). VHA's BPSO activities will enhance knowledge translation about BPGs and clinical best practices and will ultimately help us realize our core belief of providing spectacular care to our clients. We look forward to sharing our successes with you along this

exciting and challenging three-year journey!



Communications Wins Big

The communications department at VHA has been getting noticed this past quarter. VHA won "Best Booth" at the Ontario Association of Community Care Access Centres' annual conference for the second year in a row. Equipped with a lounge and free massages, people flocked to the *VHAaaaahhh Spa*. We would like to say "thank you" to all who came by to check it out and supported us at the event.

VHA also received second place for the Health Care Public Relations Association's (HCPRA) Hygeia Awards (Special Purpose Communications) for *How Far Has Your Culture Shifted*—a poster designed for Accreditation Canada's conference last February. These awards are given to honour outstanding Canadian health care communications work. Way to go VHA!



Eye on Quality

Improving Our Services through Collaborative Efforts

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” —Helen Keller

“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.” —Henry Ford

Clearly many remarkable and highly successful people throughout history appreciated the power of collaboration.

At VHA, we understand that to achieve our quality and service excellence objectives and best help our clients achieve their goals, partnerships are essential. VHA values its community partners and tries to build the best working relationships possible. Which is why, for the second year in a row, VHA administered a comprehensive Partners' Feedback Survey to identify improvements needed and to help pave the way for long-lasting, positive partnerships in future. We'll use the survey findings to improve working relationships with our valued partners.

Quality improvement in client services is a key focus at our organization – we have lots of internal quality initiatives going all the time. But external collaborations are rapidly growing in number too; and by working together, the results promise to be more profound at a systems level. Here are just some of the many exciting collaborative projects VHA is involved in:

- **Integrated Nursing and OT Behavioral Response Team at Woodgreen Adult Day Program**—a collaboration with TCCCAC and Woodgreen to help meet the nursing and behaviour management needs of seniors who attend the program.
- **Central West CCAC's Integrated Client Care Project (ICCP)**—subcontracted by Bayshore Home Health to provide rehab services to palliative care clients to better meet care needs of this population.
- **Toronto Hoarding Coalition**—leading and collaborating with 60+ organizations across multiple sectors to improve services for individuals with hoarding issues.
- **Home At Last (Scarborough)**—partnering with several agencies to facilitate a smooth transition from hospital to home for isolated seniors.
- **New Horizon's Grant for 'Seniors on the Move'**—a partnership with eight seniors centres in Chatham-Kent to provide education on fall prevention and health promotion.
- **TransCanada Community Grant**—received to provide blood pressure assessment clinics for individuals with limited access to family doctors and foot care for homebound clients, in partnership with Walpole Island First Nations Reserve.
- **United Way Dorset Hub**—a partnership, involving community agencies in a priority neighbourhood, aimed at improving access to an array of services.
- **Integrated Peri-Natal Mood Disorders (PMD) Scarborough Initiative**—targeted to newcomers to Canada, this collaboration is aimed at improving services for marginalized and/or socially isolated women at risk of PMD.
- **Changing the Conversation**—in collaboration with Toronto-Central CCAC (TCCCAC), this initiative was successfully implemented to enhance the client experience with personal support services.
- **Neighbourhood Care Teams**—also in collaboration with TCCCAC, VHA and other service providers implemented integrated care teams, arranged geographically around neighbourhoods, to improve the quality of services to clients.
- **Diabetes Self Management Research Project**—a collaboration with St. Elizabeth, TCCCAC and VHA to develop and evaluate a self management education module for in-home, one-to-one delivery to clients by personal support workers (PSWs).



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.



Visit our website at www.vha.ca

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

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

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.

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.

Donation

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.

Comments or Suggestions? Contact the interim editor of Community Care Connection

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