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care connection

Ontarians want professional home care

Most people feel they lack proper knowledge and can't ensure safe care

More than 70 per cent of Ontarians feel that qualified home care workers are more suitable to provide personal care to their loved ones than they themselves are, according to a new survey sponsored by VHA Home HealthCare and conducted by Decima Research in March.

The number one reason cited for this choice was most people felt they lacked the medical know-how, with over half (53 per cent) of respondents feeling that they could not ensure safe care. For example, 61 per cent indicated they did not know the proper way to lift an elderly or handicapped person and 29 per cent felt

that falling was one of the most common problems or hazards facing an elderly or handicapped person in their home.

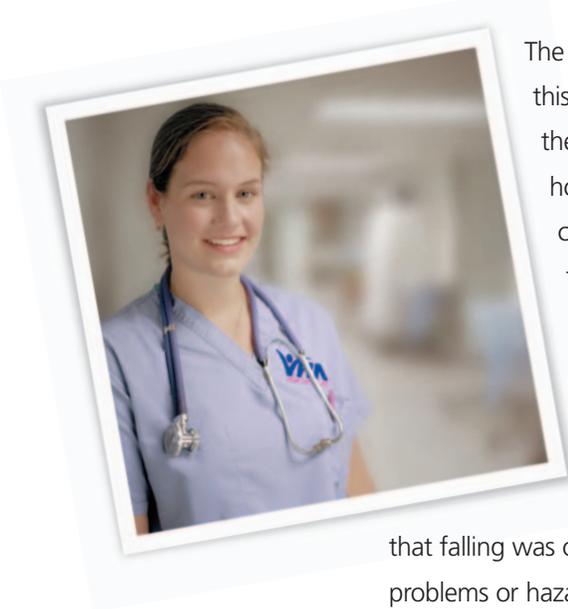
"Historically, families have relied on themselves to care for an elderly relative at home," says David Wright, Executive Director of VHA Home HealthCare. "But with people living longer and having more physical and mental complications as they age, this is becoming less of an option for most families."

Thirty-three per cent of Ontarians felt that nursing services were the most necessary to provide in the home, with homemaking

services (laundry, housework, and errands) a close second (29 per cent) and personal care (assisting with daily living activities such as bathing and dressing) following on its heels at 21 per cent.

"The dream of most seniors is to stay at home as they age, so providing high quality professional home care resources to meet this need is the top priority for VHA - either through public or private mechanisms," adds Wright. "Otherwise, home care could become a nightmare for the elderly person and/or their family."

Note: The telephone survey of 653 adults was conducted across Ontario by Decima Research Inc. in March 2002 (March 15-24). It is accurate within plus/minus 3.8%, 19 times out of 20.



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Hitting Home: The home as a site for long-term care

Most of us work in jobs where we can control or at least influence our surroundings.

By contrast, home care workers have little or no control over their workplace environment. They work in homes that may be heavy with smoke or filled with unpleasant odours, assorted animals (like the 5-foot iguana that confronted one of VHA's workers) or years of accumulated dirt. In some homes, workers even have to put their coat, shoes and lunch in a garbage bag while they work to avoid carrying cockroaches out with them.

Is the home a suitable site for the provision and receipt of health care? What is the overall quality of places where

success=dying at home

Did you know that a major indicator of successful home care is the death-at-home rate?

That's what a Montreal family doctor and professor at the University of Montreal theorizes. Dr. Geneviève Deschênes is researching Canada's death-at-home rate.

"A low percentage of deaths at home means there are not enough services to support sick and dying people and their families, so these patients have to be hospitalized," says Dr. Deschênes.

According to Dr. Deschênes, the lowest possible death-at-home rate is 10%, which is the percentage of people who die at home where no services are provided in the home. For Western Europe, the rate of deaths-at-home runs from 20% to 45%. For Quebec, current data shows a death-at-home rate of 10%. We await the percentages from the other provinces.

This research underscores the importance of high-quality, available home care of the sort that VHA is committed to providing.

The Medical Post, January 15, 2002.

For more information, see www.medicalpost.com



home care workers provide service? What adaptations are necessary? How are relationships among clients, families and paid care providers affected by the intimacy of the home environment? Are there needs that are not being met?

These are some of the questions being asked by a University of Toronto research team headed by Dr. Patricia McKeever, with the cooperation of VHA Home HealthCare, selected Community Care Access Centres and other community partners. Analysis is underway on an in-depth study of 17 home care clients, their families, and paid and unpaid caregivers. A telephone survey of 900 Ontario home care recipients is also in the works. The results promise to be interesting and important for the home care industry.

For more information, see www.hcerc.utoronto.ca.

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free to contact the editor of
COMMUNITY
care connection
Joy Klopp
at (416) 482-8782 or 1-888-314-6622
or visit our web site at
www.vha.ca



VHA embraces diversity: six of many

VHA employee stars in documentary chronicling immigrants to Canada

Filena MacLean was born in 1938 in the Outer Hebrides, Isle North Uist, Scotland, one of seven children. Her father ran the local village post office, and her family had a small subsistence plot of land with a cow or two and the food they could grow. Filena grew up speaking only Gaelic, but learned English in school.

When she married, she and her husband moved to Glasgow (“the mainland”) for economic opportunity. There, Filena worked in a retirement home as a nurse’s aide.

She, her husband and two children left Scotland for Toronto 25 years ago. Soon after arriving, Filena fell ill, and was hospitalized with severe diabetes. Eventually, she was discharged to her home with homecare assistance. Filena still remembers the homemaker: “She was so nice and such a happy person. I thought if I ever get well again, I’m going to do that.”

In time, Filena achieved her goal. After working part-time in a retirement home, she joined VHA Home HealthCare in 1983, and has worked here ever since.

Throughout almost two decades at VHA, Filena found time to nurture her Gaelic roots by singing at local Gaelic celebrations. Her reputation grew and, in 1989, Filena received the Lieutenant Governor’s award for her Gaelic singing.

Little did she know that she’d one day become the star of a BBC documentary. The Gaelic-language film, entitled

“Càirdean” (translated loosely as “Relatives in Canada”), chronicles immigrants adjusting to their new country.

The movie follows Filena as she cares for one of her regular clients. Filena is unabashedly enthusiastic about her work, and the film is a testament to her caring relationship with her client.

In person, Filena says that the best part of the job is becoming part of the household, making a real contribution to the family’s quality of life, and learning from the examples of her clients, many of whom have been a personal inspiration to her.

One client of nine years is particularly memorable for her - a father of young children who suffered from a terminal illness. This man’s daily courage truly impressed Filena. Near the end of her nine years caring for him, Filena went on a two-week vacation, and when she returned, her coordinator informed her that he was being admitted to a hospital and her assistance in the home was no longer needed. However, the coordinator called back to let her know that he refused to go to the hospital on the day the bed became available. Filena returned to his home to care for him. He told her that he was going to the hospital that day, to please get him ready and pack his belongings. Filena spoke to his wife about his request. His wife said, “He waited for you. Now he’s ready to go.” He was transferred to the hospital that day and he died that night. Filena explains, “It was a terrible loss when he died. I still carry him and the example of his courage with me. I think I will all my life.”

stories that make us proud!

VHA staff come from all over the world,
and serve clients in over 30 different languages.

Read on to hear some of their stories...



ANNA DEVENISHEK

Engineers from what's now known as Kazakhstan, Anna and her husband immigrated to Israel in 1985. There, Anna studied Hebrew and worked in a diamond factory. Eventually, economic factors led her to a service job, and after six months of training, Anna began work in a nursing home. She discovered that she loved the work.



Years later, when the family immigrated to Canada, Anna took language classes again - English, this time - and took a job with VHA Home HealthCare. To her years of training and experience, she added a PSW certificate.

"I am an international person," says Anna. "I feel richer for knowing all kinds of people in this city. No one here cares what religion you are. This country couldn't be any better for me."

HELEN XU

Helen was born and raised in the Hunan Province of China, where she taught high school math. She and her family came to Canada in 1995.



After two difficult years struggling to learn English, Helen started work in 1997, caring for a woman with multiple sclerosis. Later, she completed her PSW training and joined VHA Home HealthCare, proudly passing the English-language interview.

It was a perfect match. VHA needed her Chinese language skills, and Helen now serves clients in both Chinese and English, secretly preferring the latter because she enjoys the practice.

Her clients appreciate her kindness. One often introduces her by saying, "Helen makes my life better."

SHEIDA MAHMOUDI

A nurse from Iran, Sheida Mahmoudi and her family came to Canada in search of education and opportunity.



Sheida spent her first few years in Canada learning English and passing her registered nursing exams. After a brief period of hospital work, she joined VHA for the chance to concentrate on a few patients in their own homes, where they are more comfortable.

Sheida enjoys VHA's flexible scheduling, which allows her to attend to her family's needs. She says that although the first two years in Canada were very hard and she will always miss the family she left behind, she is

MESKEREM BEZA

A political refugee from Ethiopia, Meskerem Beza joined VHA in November 1997. She came to Canada via Athens, where she worked with



seniors for three years. In Canada, she soon found VHA Home HealthCare, where her experience and her three languages made her a natural at homemaking work.

Through VHA, Meskerem is completing her PSW training. She is grateful to VHA for this opportunity and for the fellowship of the VHA staff she met in the training.

Meskerem has sponsored her husband to come to Canada, and is closely connected to Toronto's 25,000-strong Ethiopian community through her church and friends.

ZOHAIR AL TAMIMI

Zohair Al Tamimi's difficult journey to Canada began in southern Iraq. A mechanic and a soldier, he fought Saddam Hussein's regime for many months before escaping to Saudi Arabia. There, he was captured and imprisoned.



After six years of imprisonment in a camp, three of them spent working as a mechanic, Zohair was assisted by a friendly General and permitted to immigrate.

He arrived in Canada in August 1996. Knowing no one, he lived in a government immigration apartment building, taking jobs as a carpenter and on a construction site.

In 2002, Zohair joined VHA Home HealthCare in the extreme cleaning department, a unique service that helps people with mental illness avoid eviction due to an inability to keep their home up to public health standards. He says, "I like this job. I really haven't seen this kind of thing...where people need my help so much."

VHA offers supplemental staffing services

Did you know that VHA does not just provide in-home services but also offers supplemental staffing support to long-term and acute care facilities in the Greater Toronto Area?

We have nurses, personal support workers and health care aides experienced in facility work available to support facilities' staffing needs.

VHA targets its service to the unique needs of each organization. A VHA representative meets with the director of care to determine the precise needs of the facility. VHA then assigns a special group of rigorously screened

staff to be oriented to the processes and procedures of each facility before they begin work. That core group of staff is available on a priority basis for that facility.

In addition, facilities may choose to refer families directly to VHA if the families feel that private duty staff and/or a sitter would enhance the care available to their loved one.

For more information about VHA's supplemental staffing services, please call our Service Coordinators directly at (416) 482-8774 or our main line at (416) 489-2500.

Watch for our open house

Construction will soon be complete on VHA Home HealthCare's apartment-style transitional residence for people with severe mental illness who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This supportive housing initiative is a partnership with COTA Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Mental Health Services, whose staff will assist in housing new tenants, and with on-site support services.

VHA was able to purchase the property thanks to the Board of Director's decision to invest a significant amount of capital from VHA's Charitable Future Fund. The extensive renovations were funded by the Supporting Communities



Partnership Initiative (SCPI Program) and the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program (RRAP). In addition, ongoing support dollars are being provided through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Mental Health Homelessness Initiative.

The first tenant is expected to move into the building this spring. Stay tuned to www.vha.ca for details on our open house and the "naming" of our new home!

VHA offers private care services

Most of VHA Home HealthCare's services are available, free of charge, through Community Care Access Centres or municipal government funded programs. However, as it becomes increasingly difficult for people to access government-funded care, VHA is offering its services privately to ensure that people receive the right amount of assistance.

Supplemental private services are available to anyone who needs help in the home or in an institution - whether it's for people who need to top-up on government-funded hours, or for those not qualified to receive funded care.

Because VHA is dedicated to ensuring their clients receive the care they need, revenue generated from VHA's private care program is used to assist those clients who require, but cannot afford, supplemental care. These dollars are in addition to the generous grant VHA receives from the United Way of Greater Toronto.

For more information about VHA's private services, please call us at (416) 489-2500 or 1 (888) 314-6622 or visit www.vha.ca

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

(416) 489-2500

or 1 (888) 314-6622

or visit our web site at www.vha.ca



United Way
of Greater Toronto

Good news for Toronto and Scarborough residents

VHA Home HealthCare has been awarded personal support and homemaking contracts with the Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) in Toronto and Scarborough. These significant awards are a vote of confidence in the excellent work VHA continues to do in both of these diverse urban communities.

City residents receive government-funded home care services through their local CCACs. With these contracts, VHA can provide funded home care services to the people who need it most.

VHA's winning submissions included a number of strong not-for-profit subcontractors. In Toronto, we partnered with Carefirst Seniors & Community Services Association, SPRINT (Senior Peoples' Resources in North Toronto), St. Christopher House and West Toronto Support Services. Our not-for-profit partners in Scarborough are Carefirst and Scarborough Support Services.

By teaming up with these respected local multi-service providers, we assure the residents of Toronto and Scarborough they'll be receiving quality home care services from providers they know and trust.

VHA Home HealthCare welcomes new members

Residents of Toronto, as well as Peel, Durham and York Regions are invited to consider becoming members of our organization.

We strive to be an open and accessible organization.

Consistent with our not-for-profit tradition and to help us be the best we can be, we encourage members 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 our operations and developing issues in the field of in-home services in Ontario. VHA members may also decide to become more involved by participating in the work of our Board and/or its committees.

For more information we invite you to contact Patricia Triantafilou at (416) 482-4617 or patricia@vha.ca. You can also visit our website at www.vha.ca.