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# COMMUNITY care connection

## VHA's Homelessness Prevention Program Goes Global



The Housing and Homelessness Branch of Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) is featuring VHA's Extreme Cleaning Program this June at the third World Urban Forum as an award-winning Promising Approach to preventing homelessness. Over 8,000 delegates from around the world will see the story below and hear about the success of Extreme Cleaning in preventing homelessness. We hope that sharing Eva's story will inspire other cities in other countries, as well as in Canada, to prevent the eviction of vulnerable individuals like Eva.

### Making a Clean Start

*Extreme Cleaning Program Helps the Vulnerable Stay in their Homes*

**V**HA Home HealthCare's Extreme Cleaning Program, in Toronto, Ontario, provides extensive cleaning services to low-income individuals or families who are at risk of eviction from their rental units due to unsafe or unsanitary conditions. With federal funding through the City of Toronto's Homeless Initiatives Fund and with help from the United Way of Greater Toronto, the charitable organization helps the elderly and marginalized individuals with mental illness and/or addictions avoid homelessness by taking better charge of their home.



Pauline Sampson (above) has been an Extreme Cleaner with VHA since the program began seven years ago.

Eva\* was desperate and anxious. At 54, mentally ill and living on social assistance, she just couldn't take this kind of stress and upheaval. The Housing Tribunal had given her an "official" notice that she would have to leave her home of 25 years if she didn't deal with the unsafe conditions that her lack of housekeeping posed to herself and others. She couldn't see what the problem was, but with no

family or friends to lend her a hand, she agreed to contact VHA Home HealthCare's Extreme Cleaning Program.

When VHA Home HealthCare's team of three professional cleaners arrived, they could barely find their way through the mountains of clutter in her one-bedroom apartment. Eva had a habit of collecting old newspapers and other peoples' cast-offs on garbage pick-up day. She traveled around the neighbourhood with a shopping cart and brought things home. The piles were so high and so deep, Eva had taken to having her showers at the YMCA and eating her meals at the Scott Mission.

With Eva's consent, the VHA team worked on her apartment for over three days — throwing away

*continued inside on page 5*

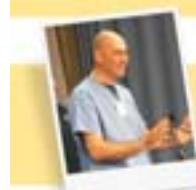
### in this issue



**Should Personal Support Workers Be Regulated?**



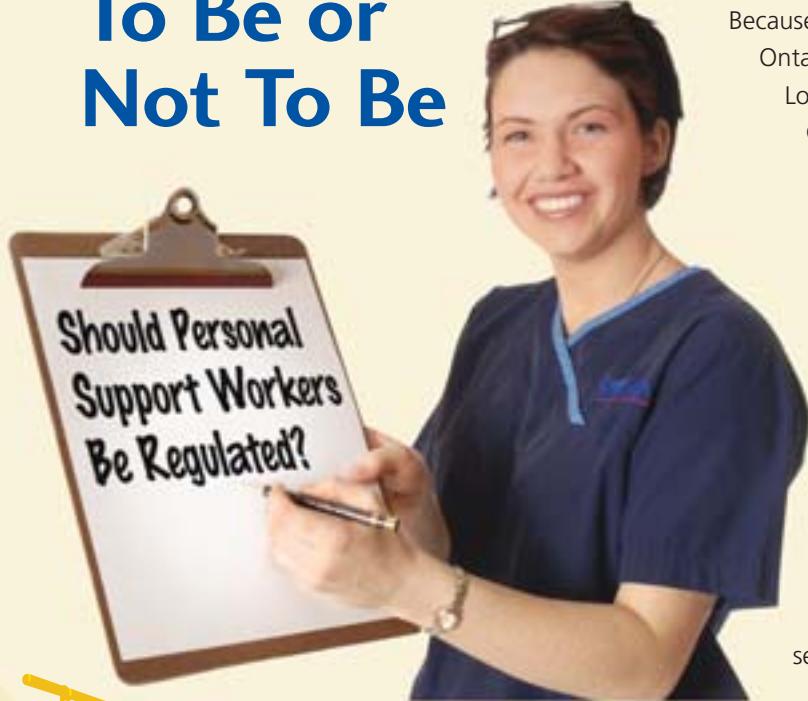
**A Son Like Robert...**



**VHA's Award Winning PSW Stands Up for Home Care**

\*Names have been changed to protect the individual's identity.

# To Be or Not To Be



## Background

Because of the crucial role of Personal Support Workers in the delivery of Ontario's healthcare and support services, the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care asked the Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) in early 2005 to consider whether the work done by PSWs indicates that PSWs should be regulated like many other healthcare professionals (e.g., nurses).

In response, the HPRAC researched PSWs' current roles, training, accountability and demographics and prepared a Discussion Guide with questions to encourage debate regarding PSW regulation. HPRAC received over 40 written submissions, and held public consultations through early June. The HPRAC expects to forward a final report to the Minister by September 2006.

Summarized below are the most commonly raised issues supporting and opposing regulation, as well as suggested alternatives to regulation. For the full submissions and discussion, see [www.HPRAC.org](http://www.HPRAC.org).

### Reasons for NOT REGULATING PSWs

- PSWs do not do health assessment, diagnosis, treatment orders or care plan changes, so there is less risk of harm than with other healthcare professionals, therefore, it is not necessary to regulate their work.
- PSW training ensures minimum skill levels and major employers ensure credentials are from reputable educational institutions.
- Grandfathered designations (e.g., Health Care Aide) will disappear in time as those old programs were replaced by the PSW program nearly 10 years ago.
- PSWs are supervised by regulated health professions (RN, MSW, etc) and by their employers who are accountable for the quality of the PSWs' care.
- Adequate legislation, quality specifications (CCAC-generated), policy and standards are in place to address complaints, accountability and management of risks.

- Regulation is too costly and may have detrimental effects on the number of individuals entering the profession and being retained in the profession. Recruitment and retention is a pervasive problem in the home healthcare sector.
- There are other less costly and more efficient ways to ensure quality care, through certification and/or registration. (See Recommended Alternatives box.)
- If services for persons with intellectual disabilities or other vulnerable individuals in the community must be done by regulated PSWs, it would require a major realignment of the work force in this sector.
- Regulation does not prevent or solve problems related to lack of constant on site supervision or poor ethical conduct with vulnerable persons. Education, supervision, performance management and public awareness address these issues, as well as government/funder standards.

We  
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MEMBERSHIP

VHA welcomes new members. 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. There is a nominal membership fee of \$25.00 (which can be waived in special circumstances). For more information, we invite you to contact Patricia Triantafilou at 416-482-4617 or [patricia@vha.ca](mailto:patricia@vha.ca)

DONATIONS

## Reasons for REGULATING PSWs

- Regulation would help to ensure safety and high quality care by: requiring a standardized knowledge base; defining scope of practice, skill requirements for job entry and use of the PSW title; creating mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and/or assessment of continuing competence.
- PSWs now provide more complex care for increasingly acute clients using more complex technology, and are often providing care without direct, personal supervision.
- Despite the importance of personal support work, PSWs are not sufficiently valued within the system. Regulation would give them credibility with the public and other members of the healthcare team.
- Training and education for personal support work differs from agency to agency and school to school, as does the role and description of PSW duties, and diplomas are still not required for the use of the PSW title in many settings.
- The present competitive bidding process in community care kept staff wages low. When cost is bottom line versus quality of care, PSWs are undervalued and under-trained. Regulation would help to address this.
- Clients served by PSWs are often the most vulnerable (frail elderly, persons with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, etc). Risk of abuse is great and adequacy of supervision of PSWs in many settings is questionable. Vulnerable people find it difficult to report concerns about their care provider. A regulatory body would be a safe place to report concerns.



## Recommended ALTERNATIVES to Regulation

Although the majority of submissions received by HPRAC did not support regulation, they did underscore the need to improve standards and education for PSWs; develop some sort of certification or registry for PSWs; and address some employer practices and human resource issues. Many submissions argued that these alternatives would protect the public as well as, if not better than, regulation — without the costs and barriers.

### Registry of PSWs....what a registry might include:

- A register or "roster" of certified PSWs with standardized requirements for competencies. Registrants would either hold a PSW certificate from a recognized educational program or show they meet the standards. A registry could clearly define the PSW role. Only registered PSWs could use the PSW title. Registration would be renewed annually. Continuing education/skills could be noted on the registry, and verification of police checks, citizenship/residency and even previous employment could be part of registration.

### Certification of PSWs...what certification might mean:

- PSW programs would have a standardized core curriculum, including clinical placement. Successful students would receive a Certificate allowing them to use the title PSW. If client care needs required a PSW, only certified PSWs could be assigned. No one could use "PSW" without approved preparation. Certification could also be augmented by some form of complaints/disciplinary process.

### Better regulation of employers and human resource practices...could mean:

- Improving general working conditions for PSWs, such as, better pay, benefits, pension plan, stability and respect for profession. Allocating more resources to recognize "good" employers who ensure employees have good working conditions and fair compensation.
- Ensuring employers have strong hiring and screening practices, supervisory supports, policies on abuse/neglect and ethical decision-making, as well as continuing education opportunities for PSWs.

## Conclusion

Whether you support regulation, certification, registration or another alternative, the benefit of consistent training/education and scope of work for PSWs across the health sector, as well as appropriately valuing the work done by PSWs is obvious, and a consistent theme throughout the submissions. Having personal support work in the policy and public spotlight is also in everyone's best interests — clients, PSWs and employers — because it reveals opportunities to improve the system and ensure both high quality care and the professional satisfaction of PSWs.

*Thanks to Linda Rosenbaum for her research and contribution to this article.*

Charitable donations to VHA Home HealthCare increase the quality of life of vulnerable people in your community. Donations are welcome, and can be mailed, made by phone (credit card contribution) or in person at our 170 Merton Street office. You may also want to consider making a "tribute gift" in honour of a loved one or special friend. To all of our donors, our sincere thanks for your generosity.

# VHA's Award Winning PSW Stands Up for Home Care



**I**magine the thrill of standing at the same podium as Minister Smitherman, giving a speech to accompany the Minister's announcement of greater financial support for home healthcare.

Alexander Anthony did just that. Alex is graduating from George Brown College's PSW Program in June. He has been working at VHA full-time, caring for vulnerable clients in downtown Toronto. He loves his work and his PSW training — and it shows in his performance. George Brown College asked Alex to represent the PSW Program at the Ministry event (held May 1st at the College), gave Alex the 2006 Award of Excellence, and will be awarding him the Dean's Medal (for the highest academic achievement and qualities for success) at his graduation in June.

In his speech, the Minister proclaimed that PSWs put the "love" in healthcare. From the podium, Alex said he could assure the Minister — that with

the Minister's announcement of new funds for more client service, better compensation for PSWs, and with great PSW programs like George Brown's — the "love" would be delivered to clients.

Alex's route to VHA and the podium at George Brown is an interesting tale in itself. Born of Greek parents, Alex was raised in Germany until he was 17 years old. His family moved back to Greece where Alex finished high school and university, and became an accountant.

After 11 years of accounting work, Alex needed a change and an adventure. He packed a few things in a bag and headed for Canada. The only English he knew on his arrival was "good morning", "how are you" and "water". He spent two years learning English, getting his residency status, and another two years in university to qualify as an accountant in Canada.

But two years was enough. Alex decided he didn't want to be an accountant; he wanted to work in healthcare. He enrolled in George Brown College's PSW program and found his calling.

Alex is dedicated to his clients. During a recent transit strike, in the heat and smog, he biked to see his clients. Alex sees his role as a caregiver, a healthcare provider, and as an advocate for his clients.

Congratulations on your awards, Alex. You represent the caring professionalism that personifies personal support work.



Minister Smitherman (centre) and Alex Anthony (2nd from right) at the Ministry event.



- **It's Accreditation Time Again**

VHA is busy preparing for our third Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation (CCHSA) survey set for November 2006. We've come up with innovative ways to involve as many of VHA's geographically diverse staff as possible in the accreditation process. We expect this accreditation to be a very positive learning experience leading to many improvements in our processes and quality of care.

- **Surveying VHA's Clients, Community Partners and Staff**

We conduct feedback/satisfaction surveys with our clients, staff and partners on a regular basis. Overall, 97% of over 450 clients surveyed in 2005 reported they would recommend VHA to others. Results from the community partner surveys in 2005, also very positive, have helped to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Finally, our staff survey was very successful. With new surveying methods, VHA increased the percent of staff completing the 2006 staff satisfaction survey to over 60%. The findings were very positive with respect to our staff's commitment to VHA and their strong belief in the value of the work that they do.

- **Some Other Recent Quality Improvement Activities**

- Implementing new processes to help ensure patient safety
- Addressing staff safety improvements identified through a gap analysis of VHA's Occupational Health and Safety Program
- Piloting a new chart audit tool

# A Son Like Robert...

**“If only more families had sons like Robert, the world would be a better place.”**

— Pauline Kimber, PSW, VHA Home HealthCare



Pauline Kimber, Lucia and Robert Troisi

One of 13 children, Robert's family emigrated from Malta. They remain a close-knit family. Despite health challenges of his own, Robert has looked after both of his parents with dedication, selflessness and love. This is what Pauline tells us...

*I personally witnessed the love and caring Robert gave to his late father and still gives to his mother. His father refused to be in a hospital or receive any professional nursing or medicine for his muscular dystrophy, and for over six months lay in bed dying and suffering. Robert would feed, wash, and turn his father every few minutes for comfort...and never left his side due to all his pain. There were countless days Robert would have very little sleep as caring for his father became a 24 hour, 7 days a week task. His father passed away in 2005.*

*Robert's mother is now chronically ill. I visit to care for Mrs. Troisi daily for an hour. Robert is the primary caregiver and ensures his mother's food, medicine and all doctor appointments are in order. Mrs. Troisi is a diabetic and Robert had to learn how to take her blood counts and give her insulin shots twice a day. Each time he gives his mother her needle, he tops it off with a kiss, saying, 'we did it.'*

*In my long career of caregiving, I have never experienced a more loving, caring, selfless individual than Robert. Both Robert's parents depended on him so much that he does not have any other social life. He is afraid to leave his mother without any supervision. He is only relieved of these duties when I arrive for an hour and when other family members visit. I do know God will reward Robert one day for his love and caring for his parents.*

Robert, thank you for allowing Pauline to share your story  
— we can all learn from heroes like you.

VHA's annual Heroes in the Home Award recognizes the extraordinary caring of one family member/nonprofessional caregiver from among the many nominated individuals caring for their loved ones at home. The award directs attention to the enormous dedication and sacrifice of the family members who provide the majority of care for the vulnerable in our community.

## Making a Clean Start *continued from the cover*

countless bags of papers, knick-knacks and even an extra sofa and TV. They washed down the walls and cupboards, scrubbed the floors and gave the carpets a deep cleaning. Eva was present the whole time to make decisions about her most precious belongings.

Somehow she was able to trust the process, and when VHA was finished, her apartment met public health and safety standards. It was difficult to have strangers going through her things, but the outcome made it worthwhile: Eva was able stay in her home. She could even use her kitchen and bathroom again.

But VHA Home HealthCare's services didn't stop there. A follow-up housekeeping team visited Eva once a week to coach her on how to keep her apartment clean over the long-term.

With time, VHA was able to connect Eva with other community resources, including a nurse who helped to get her back on her medications and a long-term homemaking service funded by the City of Toronto.

And Eva's eviction notice? She kept it of course — right on her refrigerator door! It reminds her that there's no place like home....



## IF YOU

have any comments or suggestions regarding our newsletter, please feel free to contact the editor of

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connection

Joy Klopp

at (416) 482-8782 or 1-888-314-6622  
or visit our web site at [www.vha.ca](http://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
- ✓ 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 of Greater Toronto and a contracted provider for all five Toronto Community Care Access Centres, the Durham Access to Care, the CCAC of York Region, Chatham/Kent and Sarnia-Lambton 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**

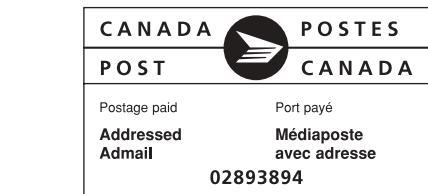
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