

Spring 2017

Issue 38

Message from the President and CEO

Carol Annett ~ CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare

Preparing for Full Bloom

Spring, more than any other time of the year, makes many people here at VHA excited by the opportunities and “blossoms” that abound both in nature and in the work we do. Since the start of the new year, we have been collaborating internally and with outside partners to sow new opportunities that will deepen and broaden our impact in 2017.



In February, we learned that the United Way Toronto & York Region selected VHA to be one of its new “anchor partners”. We look forward to this enhanced role to collaborate even more closely with the United Way and other service organizations to help improve the lives of those who are in or at risk of falling into poverty and together build strong and vibrant communities.

Part of why we were selected by the United Way is VHA’s commitment to big-picture solutions and innovation. That innovative focus is evident in our new research project that will explore whether virtual reality technology can help people with Alzheimer’s or dementia when they experience distress.

We are also turning to technology to tackle two big challenges we face as a home health care organization – scheduling our Personal Support Workers (PSWs) to optimize their availability and skills, and supporting our field staff to travel between clients with ease and efficiency. Through exciting collaborations with two technology developers and MaRS Discovery District, we believe the resulting solutions hold promising potential. We’re delighted to report that we just learned our scheduling project was just awarded one of only four \$25,000 grants by MaRS to further develop the idea!

This year, we have put a new spin on the Heart of Home Care Awards by joining forces with a bevy of community-minded organizations to host a larger event on National Carers Day (April 4). We are proud to continue to elevate the profile of friend and family caregivers who deserve to receive more recognition, funding and support in our communities.

The passage of the Patients First Act at the end of 2016 signalled a renewed effort to improve the care experience for clients and families in Ontario. The Act, in part, expands the mandate of the Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), including the transition of home care services from Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) to the LHINs. We look forward to working in collaboration with all our partners to put in place an effective, integrated, high-quality home and community care system for health.

So while we are “tilling the land” on many fronts, we are by no means taking it easy. We are planning, we are cultivating and we are carefully laying the groundwork for a vibrant and bountiful crop of client- and family-driven innovation in 2017.

Newsletter brought to you by

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Carers Get Their Day in the Spotlight

Mona Ismail is one of eight million people in Canada who are caring for a loved one living with a disability, cognitive impairment or chronic, life-limiting illness. When her father-in-law, Moosa, developed Alzheimer's disease, Mona became his primary caregiver. With no previous experience, she took on the role of nurse, healthcare advocate and occupational therapist to keep Moosa healthy, stimulate his brain and keep his spirits bright.

This type of care is hardly uncommon, and its impact on the people who provide it—and on our entire health system—is significant. One in 10 carers say they spend more than 30 hours per week performing caregiving duties. Mona, like 26 per cent of Canadian caregivers, also took a leave of absence from her career to care for Moosa. After Moosa passed away, her mother-in-law began showing signs of dementia, so she continues to serve as a caregiver.

It is estimated that unpaid caregivers deliver 70-80 per cent of the community care provided to older adults in Canada. Their services save the Canadian health system roughly \$25 billion a year. Yet, despite this tremendous contribution, these heroes in the home largely go unrecognized and under-supported.

The first Tuesday in April was established as National Carers Day to shine a light on family and friend caregivers—the individuals who prepare the meals, coordinate the medical appointments, bathe, dress



Mona Ismail (middle) is a family caregiver and one of three winners of VHA's 2016 Heart of Home Care Awards.

and advocate for their ailing loved ones in relative obscurity. On National Carers Day, individuals and groups across Canada hold events, participate in online initiatives and share the personal stories of carers from all walks of life.

For many years, VHA's Heart of Home Care Awards have shone a light on exceptional friend and family caregivers who go above and beyond to ensure the comfort and dignity of their loved ones who need special care in their home. The awards help to raise awareness of the need for more financial, programmatic, and resource supports for carers as they carry out this valuable work. For her unfailing devotion to Moosa's care, Mona won the Heart of Home Care Award in 2016 and served on the awards' selection committee for 2017.

This year's Heart of Home Care Awards ceremony will take place on National Carers Day, April 4, 2017, at Toronto City Hall. The awards will be part of a larger ceremony in conjunction with a coalition of like-minded organizations to acknowledge the work of caregivers across the country. Featuring a performance by Juno Award-winning singer Jully Black and tributes to each of the new winners, the 2017 Heart of Home Care Awards is sure to remind all in attendance of the power of love, devotion, determination and compassion of caregivers.



Juno award winner Jully Black will be performing at this year's Heart of Home Care Awards ceremony on National Carers Day, April 4, 2017.

Building Healthcare Technologies for our Future

VHA Home HealthCare is always pursuing ways to improve our services and efficiency. Technology has played a key role in several of our recent successes and we are leveraging it again in two new projects, with support from the Toronto-based innovation incubator MaRS Discovery District.

The projects—*Optimizing Personal Support Workers' Schedules* and *Improving Staff Deployment in the Community*—are part of the MaRS Innovation Partnership: Procurement by Co-Design initiative. In this initiative, healthcare organizations selected a technology vendor to co-design a tailor-made solution to address a particular problem they face. The co-design phase culminated in a 'Dragon's Den'-style pitch day, in which the organizations and vendors presented their solutions to an independent judging panel that could award a grant of up to \$25,000. VHA delivered on pitch day and was awarded the full grant to prototype our Optimizing PSW Schedules solution. In addition, we have agreed to independently pursue our Improving Staff Deployment in the Community project with our vendor partner.

Better Scheduling, Happier PSWs and Clients

One of VHA's biggest challenges is making the most of the time and skills of our 1,300 Personal Support Workers (PSWs). Making sure that we have the right PSW available at the right time, based on client needs and preferences, is a priority. This is no easy task, however, given the volume of clients VHA supports on a daily basis. While co-ordination must take into consideration a complex web of variables, VHA knows that schedule consistency and income security for our employees is paramount. We also want to make sure we are engaging PSWs to their full skills capacity so that they feel adequately challenged in their work, and these goals must be balanced with operational efficiencies to ensure our business model remains sustainable.

The co-designed technology solution VHA is developing with the support of Alayacare plans to take advantage of real-world data to adeptly navigate the complexities of scheduling. Our overarching



vision for the project? To provide greater financial stability to PSWs, and in so doing, positively affect job satisfaction, turnover rates, time spent coordinating schedules and ultimately improve the client experience.

Knowledge is Power

Roughly one-third of our field workers' day is spent travelling. Construction, transit troubles or emergency outages can delay these service providers, creating stress and frustration which can sometimes lead to client dissatisfaction because of late arrivals. Though VHA has tried to reduce delays using technology, we believe better solutions can be found.

The *Improving Staff Deployment in the Community* project aims to help our staff and service providers working in the community manage their commuting time between clients more effectively by flagging delays and providing alerts that indicate when they need to leave their current location to arrive at their next destination on time through a phone app. Developed by Ease, a young tech start-up, the technology also aims to give providers instant access to information about facilities en route, such as bathrooms, coffee shops, gas stations or banks—important knowledge to have when venturing into a new neighbourhood.

Through the co-design solution we develop, we hope to give point-of-care staff and service providers more control over their time and help them feel supported in the field and more connected to the organization as they make their way between clients.

Stay Calm and VR On



VHA Home HealthCare received a \$25,000 grant from the Canadian Centre for Aging and Brain Health Innovation (CC-ABHI) to fund *Virtual Calm*, a project set to explore whether virtual reality (VR) can ease distress in people with Alzheimer's or dementia. The funding was announced by

CC-ABHI at a collaborative event with Baycrest Health Sciences. The idea for the project came from a posting by a staff member on VHA Spark, VHA's online idea-generation tool.

Preliminary work with VR videos and patients who have dementia or Alzheimer's has been promising. VHA's *Virtual Calm* project will take this technology into the community in hopes of helping clients with Alzheimer's or dementia experience the calming effects of a peaceful "virtual journey" when they start to show signs of distress or agitation.

"We know that nearly 60 per cent of Alzheimer's and dementia caregivers feel stressed, and about 40 per cent suffer from depression. Burnout is also a very

real issue," says Dr. Sandra McKay, VHA's Manager of Research and Evaluation who took the VHA Spark idea and transformed it into a project proposal. "Through our *Virtual Calm* project, we hope to reduce challenging behaviours in clients with dementia. This could also give caregivers a tool to reduce their own stress levels. It is such an exciting project."

Sandra also notes that VHA's project was actually singled out by the Honourable Dr. Jane Philpott, the federal Minister of Health in her announcement of grant funding at Baycrest in early February. "The idea is clearly making waves," Sandra adds. "It also really proves that grassroots innovation works. An employee had an idea and the organization not only heard it, but took the initiative to take it to the next level and investigate it through this research project. That's pretty impressive."

VHA's *Virtual Calm* project is one of 31 projects receiving funding as part of CC-ABHI's 2017 SPARK program. In all, \$1.4 million in funding was granted across North America to enable organizations to further develop grassroots ideas into proofs of concept or prototypes that have the potential to improve brain health or quality of life for older adults.



VHA'S LGBTQ2S Working Group

Several years ago, VHA took part in a research project that looked at the provision of home care services for the LGBTQ community across Ontario. Led by researchers at York University, McGill University and the Toronto Central CCAC, VHA provided a home care perspective for the length of the study. However, we did not need to wait for the final results to start looking at how our own organization provides care to our LGBTQ clients.

As such, we began working with some community partners, including The 519 in Toronto, to develop joint training and education programs and services for our staff and service providers. To date, training has taken place primarily in the GTA and Durham Region but will be expanded to other regions by mid year.

In 2016, VHA established an LGBTQ2S (Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual-Trans-Queer-Two Spirited) Working Group with staff and a client partner to identify organizational gaps and look at how to do things better and be a truly inclusive organization for our LGBTQ2S clients, staff, service providers and volunteers. The group has identified four key focus areas for action and we are looking forward to broadening its impact in 2017.

If you are a client or a client family member who would like to join the working group, please contact our Client and Family Liaison, Stacey Ryan, at 647-460-8595 or sryan@vha.ca

Eye on Quality

Taking the Lead on Client Engagement

Following our very successful Accreditation Survey in November 2016, VHA recently received more great news! VHA's *Client Choice Awards Program* has been recognized by Accreditation Canada as a **leading practice** or "an outstanding example of leadership by a health service organization that demonstrates innovation, creativity and has a positive impact on services or outcomes for clients and their families."

Our application highlighted a number of distinct attributes about the program:

- We successfully transformed this recognition program to include nominations from clients and their families—receiving more than 400 nominations in 2015 and 300 in 2016.
- We created 10 short videos to showcase how each winner exemplifies our mission to deliver spectacular

care. The videos were also repurposed for service provider education and further inclusion of the client and family voice in orientation materials.

- VHA is committed to bringing the voices of clients and their families into all aspects of the work that we do, and the Client Choice Awards Program is one example—as it was a suggestion by a member of our Client and Carer Advisory Council.
- VHA is continuously working to improve employee satisfaction. Our work-life survey results reveal positive trends that we feel can be attributed in part to this enhanced recognition program.

Visit <https://accreditation.ca/leading-practices> for more.



United Way funding is critical to VHA's Parent Relief Program in Scarborough.

Anchoring VHA in the Community

In February, VHA Home HealthCare became one of a select group of multi-service agencies invited to deepen our relationship with United Way Toronto & York Region. As an anchor agency, VHA will collaborate with the United Way on issues related to poverty, and will support local services, contribute to research and advocacy efforts, and take a more active role in helping the United Way keep the social services sector strong.

"This is a great honour," says Carol Annett, VHA's President and CEO. "As VHA was a founding member agency of United Way Toronto, we've had a long history of partnering with them to deliver essential services to the most vulnerable in the community. Their vision has led to new thinking on community challenges and has inspired innovative approaches we're excited to be part of."

Anchor agencies receive five years of United Way funding. Through this longer-term United Way investment, anchor agencies are able to be real change-makers in collaboration with United Way, bringing new, nimble and effective approaches to community challenges.



Creating More Independence

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A DIVISION OF VHA HOME HEALTHCARE



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.



United Way
Member Agency



Visit our website at www.vha.ca

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

VHA PROVIDES:

- 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/Nurse Practitioners
- Social Workers
- Rehab Assistants
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Client Service Coordinators/Supervisors

VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of United Way Toronto & York Region 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 Triantafyllou at 416.482.4617 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 editor of Community Care Connection

Pamela Stoikopoulos : 416.489.2500 x4344 or 1.888.314.6622 email: pstoik@vha.ca

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