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Message from the President and CEO

Carol Annett ~ CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare

Winds of Change, Seeds of Growth

“Sometimes in the winds of change we find our true direction.”

-Anonymous



“Whirlwind” may be a good way to describe the hive of activity at VHA as we continue forging ahead on a number of initiatives—from research projects and technology investments, to enhancements in our integrated palliative care program spurred on by an enthusiastic team of carer partners. We know change can often be difficult for an organization, however with the rapid speed at which home and community care are evolving, it is important for us to not only keep up, but get ahead of the curve.

As much as we strive to be all things to all people and communities, capacity is always a challenge. So it is was with mixed emotions that VHA recently discontinued service in Erie St. Clair, where we have been a key home and community care provider since 2004. While it is hard to say goodbye to our incredible and well-respected team in this region, we believe it is the right time to do so. The move helps us enhance our focus on the seven other Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) regions we work in and, in particular, the expansion of our nursing team in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). It also allows us to more fully participate in LHIN sub-regional planning in areas where we can add the most value.

As we begin this new chapter, we are excited to increase our GTA nursing volumes and expand our basket of services to include dietetics in the GTA. As you likely know, the winds of structural change have also picked up with the integration of the Community Care Access Centres (CCACs) into the LHINs and the continued welcome rollout of the *Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care*. We are excited to be part of this transition and have enjoyed meeting with many of our

new LHIN partners. We look forward to the challenging but critical work ahead to better serve our clients and families where they prefer to be: living at home and remaining part of their local community. VHA is committed to collaborating to ensure greater connectivity between all parts of the health care system so everyone feels supported and has the best care experience possible.

On an “inside” note, after many months of planning, designing and testing, VHA launched its new intranet this summer. “The Loop” is a central hub for all our staff and service providers to access information and connect with colleagues.

We’ve also successfully tested the waters of our new Client Relationship Management software, developed with AlayaCare, with our rehab programs in the London and Ottawa regions. The smaller-scale rollout allows us to fine-tune the software and improve upon it before our 2018 rollout across all of VHA’s services.

VHA continues to make great strides in digital charting through our Electronic Medical Record Initiative (EMRI). Implementation for our child and family nursing team, now underway, marks the final transition for our nursing staff to a paperless environment. But there’s never a dull moment on the information highway and we’re already setting our sites on rolling out electronic medical records to VHA’s Occupational Therapy team in early 2018.

Although the fall season has been busier than ever, we look forward to continuing to plant the seeds of success that result in bountiful growth and an enhanced client and family experience.

Partnering to Advance Care

VHA is excited to announce that we've partnered with sponsors Health Quality Ontario and Associated Medical Services for Change Day Ontario, to help empower our team to take small actions that bring positive change to the health system.

Change Day Ontario's philosophy is that small changes can amount to big impact and this comes to life through pledges that commit to driving change. Change Day is about people connecting through ideas and stories, sharing them on social media, engaging with one another, overcoming barriers and ultimately helping to improve health care for our clients.

What we know at VHA is that our staff and service providers are the ones that deal face-to-face with clients and really understand what changes will make a difference to their care and how to improve the way they work.

From now until November 17, 2017, we're encouraging our entire team to participate in Change Day by making a pledge. Pledges can be small actions, like smiling at clients to brighten their day, to larger-scale actions, like creating new relationships with community partners to better support our clients.



Change Day Ontario VHA Home HealthCare Creating More Independence The difference is you.

Many VHA staff and service providers have already pledged to make a difference. Here are a few pledges:

I pledge to...

"Think about how I would feel if I were to be in my client's situation."

"Make my default question 'why not' to help VHA be more innovative when facing age-old health care challenges."

"Promote safe and effective use of technology!"

"Spend more time away from my desk visiting clients and learning from our point-of-care staff and service providers."

"While the pace of change in health care can sometimes be overwhelming, it can also be exhilarating. In no other industry is change and the constant quest for 'better' more important – as it is our health and our quality of life that is at stake," notes Kathryn Nichol, VHA's Vice President Quality, Best Practice, Research and Education and Chief Nursing Executive. "Change Day celebrates that all change—big or small, personal or work-related, client-focused or system-focused—will play a role in a better health system and better health care. I am delighted to be a Change Day Ambassador for VHA and see the pledges that we commit to making in honour of Ontario's first Change Day."



Change Day Ontario VHA Home HealthCare Creating More Independence The difference is you.



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Visit our website at www.vha.ca

Teacher in the House: Unique ESL Program Helps Newcomers Learn English at Home

As any parent will tell you, bringing a new baby into the world can be an overwhelming experience, even when all the supports—relatives, neighbours and friends—are there to pitch in. But imagine if you were a newcomer with no family or friends nearby and limited language skills to communicate.

It's a barrier that many new immigrants to Canada face and one that VHA's In-Home English as a Second Language (ESL) Program is trying to help participants overcome. The project was developed through VHA's Ideas to Action/Innovation Fund and began accepting clients in March.

Its aim is to help remove some of the roadblocks for new parents who also happen to be newcomers. While free community-based English lessons are available through the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, most new moms are unable to attend because childcare is only available to kids 18 months old and up. The In-Home ESL Program brings the teacher right to clients' homes once a week so they don't have to worry about arranging childcare.

The initiative is, by all accounts, an overwhelming success. "It's been really positive," says Valerie Mason, VHA's Co-ordinator for the In-Home ESL Program. "The volunteer teachers really enjoy the one-on-one time with the clients, who are finding their confidence is increasing—they're feeling more comfortable." She adds that while the In-Home ESL Program has been a win-win on all sides, it will take a rest in mid-November for evaluation and, in so doing, will hopefully secure long-term funding for 2018.

"It's easy to take care of the kids and learn," says ESL student and mother of two young children Nishani Karnan. "It would be difficult to go somewhere else."

Though Nishani took English lessons in 2012 when she arrived in Canada from her native Sri Lanka, language learning is a long road and new challenges have cropped up since her children were born, including a health challenge. Fortunately, her volunteer teacher Debbie Green was able to help by working with Nishani on language to explain symptoms in English to Nishani's specialist.



Nishani (left) and her daughter (centre) get language practice from volunteer ESL teacher Debbie (right).

For Debbie, a life-long volunteer, the work is fun and interesting. "I'm taking a language myself—I'm learning Spanish—and I understand how difficult it is to learn a language, so I have total empathy," she says. "I find it really rewarding... You make a connection. It kind of gets you out of yourself and you're helping someone," Debbie notes thoughtfully.

"We try to customize to each learner's needs," says Valerie, who also notes that the volunteer teachers receive ample training and other opportunities to improve their skills through regular lunch-and-learn sessions. Together teacher and student set three goals to work on throughout the duration of the course. Most are focused on improving communication for everyday tasks, like talking on the telephone, chatting with neighbours and, most often, learning to more effectively communicate at the doctor's office—especially handy since there are many appointments in a baby's first 18 months of life.

For Nishani, the benefits extend beyond doctor's visits and into her community. "I'm more comfortable talking to my neighbours," she smiles shyly. The language lessons also help her build confidence in working towards her goal of higher education when her children eventually enter grade school. "I studied pharmacy in Sri Lanka so I want to go to college here," she says. "I want to be a pharmacist's assistant one day."

VHA Names Inaugural Research Fellows

VHA has marked another first for our organization—teaming up with University Health Network and Sunnybrook Hospital to offer two new research fellowships for VHA staff and service providers. The



Olivia Logan

inaugural fellowships will see Olivia Logan, an RPN on VHA’s Scarborough Palliative Care Team, and Brydne Edwards, an Occupational Therapist with VHA’s GTA West rehab team, seconded to our research department for six months to participate in quality improvement and research projects.



Brydne Edwards

“We are very excited to partner with The University Health Network (UHN) and Sunnybrook to bring these opportunities to our staff and service providers,” says Sandra McKay, VHA’s Manager, Research and Evaluation. “The research fellowships are a chance for Brydne and Olivia to enhance their professional development,

critical thinking, and problem solving skills. I look forward to working with them both and to seeing how their contributions enhance clients’ quality of life and ultimately help improve VHA’s care.”

Olivia is also excited to improve client care. She will be implementing a quality improvement project to identify how supported palliative staff feel as they work in an emotionally taxing field. Her vision is to create a physical space or another vehicle through which staff can share and process their emotions to create a sense of closure and improve their well-being.

“I feel great that I’ve been selected!” she says. “It only validates that my ideas aren’t half bad and someone is willing to give it a shot.”

Brydne is also excited for the opportunity to apply efficient, evidence-based, client-centered improvements to VHA services. Her project was inspired by her clinical experience in the community. “Older adult clients with cognitive impairments and their caregivers often expressed concern about losing independence and mobility when I recommended equipment. I also noticed that that some clients and caregivers found it difficult to implement cognitive remediation strategies,” she says. In response, Brydne will implement a QI project on *Enhancing physical activity in the disease self-management plan for clients living with mild cognitive impairment, dementia and Alzheimer’s Disease*.

Both women see great potential in this opportunity. “First and foremost, I hope that my project is useful to VHA’s clinical staff, and is meaningful to our clients,” says Brydne. “I hope that my experience will encourage other clinicians to pursue this fellowship [and] that the skills I learn will enable me to become a knowledgeable leader for future quality improvement projects and a mentor for future fellows.” Olivia is similarly excited by the skills she will gain. “I am looking forward to learning how to be a professional leader. I hope to be inspiring to my peers,” she notes.

Over the last decade, VHA has built a robust, strategic research engine to find solutions to health and community care challenges. In collaboration with academic, medical and scientific partners, we maintain a healthy roster of projects designed to connect best practice/research to everyday clinical and health care practice in the community. We regularly engage our staff and service providers in research projects that add value to the sector to improve services in the community. The new fellowship program continues this pursuit of excellence.



Eye on Quality

Home Care Safety Improvement Collaborative Series

After successfully completing Wave One of the Home Care Safety Improvement Collaborative, which focused on reducing harm from falls in home care, earlier this year VHA embarked on Wave Two – a journey to improve safety and quality in home care. The purpose of this collaborative is to:

- Increase understanding and application of quality improvement methodology.
- Develop effective strategies to engage clients and caregivers in improvement initiatives.
- Build effective communication strategies and high functioning teams.
- Engage senior leadership and reinforce safety as a strategic priority.

As one of eight leading organizations participating in this collaborative, VHA's project team is focusing on reducing the incidence of health-associated infections at central and peripheral catheter line sites for clients receiving nursing services. "This is a cutting-edge look at an important safety area,"

notes Kathy Sidhu, Manager, Quality, Client Safety and Client Experience. "Little is known about the number of acquired infections at line sites in home care and with home care nurses more involved in providing intensive and invasive care, infection prevention and control practices are critical."

Over the course of 12 months, VHA's project team will work closely with quality improvement and measurement coaches to identify the clinical symptoms associated with an acquired infection and embed those in VHA's nursing electronic medical record initiative (EMRI) to support assessment and documentation at the point of care. Once nurses document symptoms, EMRI will provide support through prompts and actions to take in the presence of possible infection. VHA will collect the data of tracked symptoms and monitor actions taken to decrease the time between identification of infection and intervention to ultimately maximize client safety. VHA is very excited to be a part of this project and improve overall quality of care.

Bringing Some Play to HSSO



VHA's Communications team was all fun and games during Health Shared Services Ontario's (HSSO) 2017 Achieving Excellence Together Conference in June. Equipped with bright colours, cheerful personalities and giant games of Jenga, Connect 4 and KerPlunk, we had a great time raising awareness of our VHA Playdate program. Thanks to everyone who joined in and took a chance building our wobbly Jenga tower during the event!

VHA Playdate is a unique six-week program that began in fall 2016 and was co-designed by Client and Family Partners who saw a need for their kids, who have complex medical needs, to come together to socialize, play and have a blast with other kids. It also gives parents an opportunity to take a well-deserved break on the weekend.

While the program ran again in the spring, it is currently on hold as we work towards securing long-term funding.

To learn more about supporting this program, please contact Sandra Tedesco at 416-482-8783 or visit www.vha.ca/playdate.





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.



ACCREDITATION CANADA



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, and Champlain Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), the City of Toronto's Homemakers and Nurses Services program and the Regional Municipality of Durham. Services are also supported by the Smart & Caring Community Fund held within the London Community Foundation.

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

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