

It's pretty hard to believe that this is only the spring edition, given that the weather outside as this is written makes it feel like we're on the cusp of summer. Like these unseasonable temperatures, initiatives at VHA are also "heating up" as we continue to roll up our sleeves and work on realizing our mission and three strategic pillars: *More Independence, More Outstanding Home Care and More Talent and Innovation.*



In this issue we highlight a perfect example of how something as simple as a wheelchair ramp can make a huge impact on providing *More Independence* to a client. What's so incredible about Concepcion and Merlinda's story in *The Steps to More Independence include a Ramp* is the collective energy it took—from Concepcion's family, the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), VHA and a new and willing property manager—to finally get a ramp installed. It's a reminder of the importance of teamwork and collaboration and also inspires us to remain resolute in our determination to meet each client's unique needs and help provide them with the necessary tools to realize their goals—even if that goal is as simple as getting to an adult day program unimpeded.

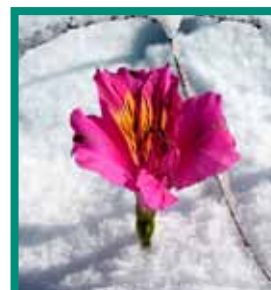
The recent selection of VHA Home HealthCare as a Best Practice Spotlight Organization Candidate (a program sponsored by the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario) will undoubtedly help us deliver on our pillar of *More Outstanding Home Care* over the next three years. This exciting initiative will involve all of our disciplines and in addition to improving client experience, is sure to propel service integration and interdisciplinary collaboration forward at a more rapid pace.

VHA was also in the "spotlight" again as one of the key planners and participants in *Help for Tenants Who Hoard: Balancing Rights and Safety*, a sold out day-long workshop hosted

by Westpark Healthcare Centre. VHA's own Catherine Chater, Occupational Therapist and co-author of *The Community Clutter and Hoarding Toolkit*, gave a compelling talk on clinical interventions and practical tools to help challenge clients' thinking on hoarding and develop trust to encourage behaviour change. Our ongoing work in this unique field continues to further VHA's goal of *More Talent and Innovation* and our core belief that we must collaborate to unearth innovative answers to complex challenges.

Finally, it's time once again to honour caregivers who tirelessly give their time and energy to ill or disabled loved ones so they can remain as comfortable and independent as possible. **The Heart of Home Care Award** is open to all family caregivers in Ontario, so if you know an incredible caregiver, I encourage you to nominate them by April 25, 2012 (details in this issue). These stories of commitment, love and compassion are nothing short of inspirational.

I'll also remind you to save the date for this year's Heart of Home Care Award presentation on **Monday June 11, 2012**. I encourage you to join us for this very special event. Let's just hope that we don't get snow in June!



# The Steps to More Independence include a Ramp

For many people independence is something taken for granted. You may be lucky enough to choose what to eat for lunch, what clothes you want to wear and go wherever you want, whenever you want. For those who are living with a debilitating health condition though, the idea of independence takes on a whole new meaning. At the core of VHA's beliefs is that clients stay in the "driver's seat" so they can live as independently as possible. Sometimes this is realized with little effort, but at other times it takes energy, commitment and even the support of a community to get there.

This was certainly the case for Merlinda and her mom, Concepcion.

The mother and daughter had lived in the same Toronto apartment building for over 20 years when in 2008, Concepcion had a stroke which left her paralyzed on her left side and in a wheelchair.

*"I work seven days a week—five days at my full-time job and at a supermarket on Saturday and Sundays,"* says Merlinda who, despite this hectic schedule, is still Concepcion's primary caregiver.

Fortunately, Concepcion has the support of community programs and health professionals including a Personal Support Worker, who visits in the morning, and an adult day program she goes to in the afternoon. *The problem?* Until last summer Concepcion's building didn't have a wheelchair ramp so getting in and out of the building always required help.

## Life Before the Ramp

*"My mom would come down the elevator to go to her day program and wait in the 'moving room.' Sometimes the PSW would leave her there because the pickup transportation was not there yet and the PSW would have to go to the next client,"* says Merlinda as she explains Concepcion's day-to-day routine.

The PSW could not leave her outside because Concepcion couldn't open the moving room's heavy industrial door on her own if the pickup didn't show up.

Some days getting Concepcion out of the building became an impossible task; *"Especially the first week and the last week of the month because there are a lot of people moving in and out and sometimes there are a lot of things in the moving room that people leave there when they move out,"* says Merlinda.

Add to that the fact that there were often trucks or cars blocking the back door, and unshovelled snow in winter and it's no wonder Concepcion and Merlinda felt trapped.

## Time for a Change

*"It was first in 2009 when I called and asked (the building manager about installing a ramp). They said they were going to look into it and nothing came about."*



*Concepcion (left) with her daughter Merlinda*

Fortunately, in the middle of 2009 Merlinda was sent a new Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) case manager, Nancy Web. *“The first thing we talked about was getting a ramp for mom,”* notes Merlinda.

The CCAC case manager sent in Robert Schenk, a social worker from VHA Home HealthCare. *“Robert and the CCAC case manager were the ones who really directed me on how to do things. They both were a big, big help.”*

Getting the ramp built required lots of persistence and follow-up calls to building management. With the help of the social worker, Merlinda finally submitted a written request on behalf of Concepcion. *“We went to management a couple times to follow up. Robert would call and follow up for me, but there were no new updates until 2010.”*

In 2010 the building went under new management and Robert submitted the letter again. Not long after, the new management came to assess the building and proceeded with the plans to build the new ramp.

Though it took many phone calls, follow-up visits and letters, the ramp to Concepcion’s building was finally installed.

## Life with the Ramp

*“It makes my day a lot easier and less stressful because the health agency of my mom’s PSW doesn’t have to call me at work and bug me and say, ‘The pickup for your mom is late again,’”* says Merlinda.

Now Concepcion experiences a sense of independence: *“My mom can now wait here in the front lobby where it is all open with glass and if her PSW needs to leave she can look out the window to see if her pickup is here,”* says Merlinda. *“My mom just opens the doors because now they have automatic doors that she can push by herself...(and) is so much happier because she doesn’t have to wait in a room where she can’t see outside... she can even see the time now. She likes that,”* adds Merlinda.



*Concepcion (seated) with Merlinda and VHA Social Worker Robert Schenk*

Robert notes that the battle to have the ramp installed was really a team effort. *“Without all the follow-up calls and help from the CCAC case manager, it’s hard to say if the ramp would have ever been built.”*

Judging from the huge smiles on their faces it’s not an understatement to say that this three-year battle has given both Merlinda and Concepcion their lives back. *“My mom has so much more independence now. It is easier for her to get around. Without all the help from the CCAC, Robert and new management things would not have been done,”* reflects Merlinda. *“They worked really hard and kept pushing for me and my mom... and there are lots of people who use the ramp every day. Not just my mom, but other tenants who have walkers and parents with kids.”*

# VHA Steps into the Spotlight

VHA is delighted to announce its selection as a Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) Best Practice Spotlight Organization Candidate (BPSO). Becoming a BPSO candidate aligns seamlessly with VHA's core beliefs, that our care *must be spectacular and continuously focused on quality improvement and safety as well as client-driven*. At the end of the three years, the organization becomes a Best Practice Spotlight Organization, "officially" recognizing VHA's commitment to delivering best practices in client care.



"It is a hugely exciting initiative because it speaks to the importance of putting patients first and VHA's commitment to be the best," says Bea Mudge, Vice President of Best Practices, Research and Education and Chief Nursing Executive at VHA Home HealthCare, who helped draft the application and will lead the BPSO initiative.

Each chosen organization centres on specific guidelines deemed most beneficial to their patients. VHA will focus on:

- 1) Assessment and management of stage I to IV pressure ulcers
- 2) Client-centered care
- 3) Prevention of falls and fall injuries in older adults
- 4) End-of-life care during the last days and hours
- 5) Assessment and management of pain

This opportunity allows VHA to develop staff and service provider skills and competencies and keeps them up-to-date on the latest practices in delivering quality care. The rigorous criteria ensure that changes made are continuously evaluated for the impact on organizational, system and patient outcomes. Once the three years are complete, VHA receives validation as being a Best Practice Spotlight Organization and can share its knowledge with other organizations in the community.

"Our participation in BPSO reflects our ongoing work to ensure the best outcomes for our clients and families," notes VHA President and CEO, Carol Annett.

Look for updates on BPSO initiatives in future issues.



## Managing Hoarding in the Community

A one-day conference on hoarding

Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre  
McLaughlin Auditorium  
(E-Wing, Ground Floor)

**Friday, June 1st, 2012**

**Cost: \$95** (includes speakers, refreshments and lunch)

*Receipts and certificate of attendance will be issued.*

Proceeds go to the Toronto Hoarding Coalition.

For more information or to register please contact:  
Malak Sidky at **416-459-0266** or **msidky@rogers.com**

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# Eye on Quality

Our eyes have never been more on quality than they are now. A number of new quality reports and dashboards are available to help managers monitor performance in their teams or department. New reports are available to the front-line providers as well to help them track their own responsibilities—many of which are updated automatically on a daily or weekly basis, providing ‘real time’ information and allowing proactive response to mitigate potential problems.

Several initiatives are underway to improve the client experience and we’re seeing clear evidence that clients are benefiting! We worked with the Toronto Central CCAC to pilot “Changing the Conversation” (CTC)—a project aimed at improving the client experience by encouraging PSWs to ask their clients what is most important to them. The results of the pilot showed higher client experience ratings for clients that were part of CTC compared to those not included in the project. Since rolling out CTC training across all Toronto teams, client experience survey results steadily increased. Compared to the

previous year, clients’ ratings on a number of key items are five to 12 per cent higher after implementing CTC and other initiatives aimed at improving service quality and client experience with VHA’s services. Client complaints went down substantially as well indicating our improvement strategies are working.

As we prepare for our 2012 Accreditation Survey with Accreditation Canada, we gain further insight on where opportunities for improvement exist. Needless to say, continuous quality improvement is widespread and gaining momentum!

## Know a caregiver who is all heart?



Nominate them for the



Tell us about a family caregiving hero including:

- Who they are;
- What they’ve done to support a loved one and;
- The impact this help has on the lives of others.

Send an email or voicemail to Kim Anderson at **416-489-2500 ext. 4381** or [kanderson@vha.ca](mailto:kanderson@vha.ca) with “Heart of Home Care” as the subject.

Or mail it to:  
 VHA Home HealthCare,  
 Attn: Kim Anderson  
 30 Soudan Ave. #500,  
 Toronto, ON, M4S 1V6

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**DEADLINE EXTENDED TO APRIL 25TH!**



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Visit our website at [www.vha.ca](http://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](mailto: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

**Pam Stoikopoulos** : 416.489.2500 x4344 or 1.888.314.6622 email: [pstoik@vha.ca](mailto:pstoik@vha.ca)