

AT YOUR DOOR

A Newsletter for the Friends of Visiting Nurse Association of Indiana County



Attending the banquet at Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Club to receive the "Rising Star" award were VNA staff and volunteer leadership. (No wonder they were smiling!) From left: Maureen Bonatch, Director of Extended Home Care (EHC); Rhonda Warren, Executive Assistant to the CEO; Susan Brody, EHC Board Chairwoman; Marion Nugent, Director of Hospice and Palliative Care; Linda Bettinazzi, CEO; Ina Abrams, EHC Board Vice-Chairwoman; and Debra Bier, Director of Home Health Care.



The company we keep

*And the vocabulary we love to read:
Innovative, promising, premiere*

The "People Do Matter" Awards were created in the year 2000 by the Allegheny Conference on Community Development to recognize and promote innovative practices in employee recruitment, retention, performance, and productivity. The program is now sponsored by the Pittsburgh Human Resources Association (PHRA), with 14 regional partners. The recipients have included some of the best-known corporations, banks, retail chains, and educational institutions in the region. This year, the awards committee created a new category of recognition expressly to applaud "emerging initiatives which show great promise." VNA Extended Home Care was one of two organizations to receive the inaugural "Rising Star" Award.

Quality Insights

Because of the outstanding contributions of our Home Care division to Medicare's benchmarking

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From the CEO's desk



"It's true that desperate times call for desperate measures." That's how I decided to open my article for *Home Care Success* magazine. The topic was how VNA Extended Home Care reduced its companion and aide staff turnover rate from a staggering 53% to just 11% in three years. Our success was recognized by the Pittsburgh Human Resources Association with its "People Do Matter - Rising Star" Award - part of the opening feature on page one. [The full article is excerpted on pages 4-5.]

More recently, following an intensive on-site visit from the Community Health Assessment Program (CHAP), the entire agency was commended for the level of professional care we provide, "with a huge amount of caring." The CHAP accreditation team concluded that "on a scale of one to ten, VNA services would fall very close to a 10." We recognize that no agency is perfect, but with only *four* areas noted for improvement out of 4,000, we believe we are doing things right. In addition, because of the initiatives which merited the "Rising Star" Award, noted above, Extended Home Care was awarded the highest CHAP rating of commendation for recruitment and retention initiatives.

With all of this said, I would be remiss if I did not bring you up to date on the profound turmoil we are experiencing in the healthcare system. It's a national issue, covered almost daily in the news media, and its complexity affects every household in Indiana County. As we get better and better at what we do, funding cuts get worse and worse. By every possible measure, home health care is the best and most economical option for people whose acute or chronic conditions would otherwise result in admission to a hospital or nursing home. The VNA's services help keep people safely and happily at home, where they want to be. For decades, this fact has been validated by equitable Medicare and Medicaid coverage. But as the demand for our services has grown exponentially with the growth of the 65+ population, traditional Medicare funding for home care has been reduced ten years in a row. We have prided ourselves on our historic mission to provide home health and hospice services to *all who need it, regardless of their*

ability to pay. Now, with unreimbursed care expenses exceeding half a million dollars a year, that mission may soon be seriously compromised.

Fortunately, in the midst of discouragement, our excellence has been recognized by such prestigious groups as the Pittsburgh Human Resources Association, CHAP, and the Pennsylvania Homecare Association. We hear frequently from grateful patients and families who help us keep our perspective about our work. Every day I witness gratifying signs of progress and innovation. "The View from Suite 3000" on the next page provides glimpses of our 200 employees, caring for 700 patients on any given day, making 50,000 visits a year.

There really is much to celebrate this spring. As always, I am most grateful for the many ways the Indiana community supports us, and I look forward to communicating with you in the future. Please call me at any time with your questions or comments at 724/436-6340.



Congratulating Jane McGee (center), at the Healthcare Worker Recognition Luncheon are VNA Nurse Supervisors Jean Rapach (left) and Diane Hanna. One of the VNA's honorees, Jane has been with the agency for 13 years and most recently coordinated the VNA's influenza immunizations to more than 5,500 people.

The View from Suite 3000

- Twenty VNA administrative assistants attended the luncheon and fashion show hosted by the Zonta Club of Indiana. The event for Administrative Professionals Day was at Indiana Country Club on April 26, 2006.
- A team of executives from the VNA of Des Moines, Iowa, spent two days in March with our VNA senior staff. They are interested in starting a private duty branch, and they chose to study our Extended Home Care organization as a model.
- New mothers at Indiana Regional Medical Center are now treated to an "It's a Wonderful Life" gift bag to take home. Included in it are a baby comb from the VNA and a

brochure about Extended Home Care's new "Mom and Baby Club." The newest addition to the VNA Family of Services includes "Baby Care 101" (formula prep, feeding, bathing, diapering), nighttime care, skilled nursing checks, meal preparation and household help, breastfeeding assistance, and care for older children.

Call for more information or check our website.

- The Indiana Healthcare Careers Consortium hosted the second annual Healthcare Worker Recognition Luncheon on April 12, 2006, when 45 people from all areas of direct care were applauded for their emphatic commitment to caring for others. The VNA's eight

nominees were recipients that day:

Dr. Stella Boron, Medical Director, VNA Family Hospice and Palliative Care

Karen Catalano, Home Care Companion, Extended Home Care

Candy Grove, Nursing Assistant, Extended Home Care

Jennifer Howlett, Medical Social Worker, VNA

Angela McCloskey, Registered Nurse, Family Hospice and Palliative Care

Jane McGee, Registered Nurse, VNA

Marybelle Parks, Home Health Aide, VNA

Mark Reed, Nurse Aide, Extended Home Care

The company we keep

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efforts, the VNA has been designated a *Premiere Q-MAP Agency*. Short for Quality Medication Administration Program, Q-MAP has been the focus of a year-long study to identify the best home healthcare practices in the administration of oral medication. Taking your medicine - sounds easy? Not really. Patient confusion and/or non-compliance in the use of their prescription medications account for an alarming number of hospital and emergency room admissions. The VNA's staff have been leaders in Pennsylvania's pilot program. *Worth noting:* Because it is the VNA's mission and policy to help all patients needing skilled

home nursing care, regardless of their means or insurance, we admit many of the frailest and most complicated cases in our region. The heartening gains in our patients' health, through our quality improvement measures, have been attained across the board, not only with the relatively healthiest patients.

For more information, visit
www.vnaindacoounty.com
or call 724/463-6340 for
Home Health Care
Hospice and Palliative Care
Extended Home Care

"My guardian angel"

Quick action in an emergency

Received from the daughter of a patient receiving the services of an Extended Home Care Nurse Aide (not identified for reasons of privacy):

"On February 20, our mother became unresponsive - her head dropped, and there was no palpable pulse. Through the Nurse Aide's quick intervention in notifying my brother, their calling 911, and then remaining with her until the paramedics arrived, she was LifeFlighted to UPMC-Presbyterian within 45 minutes of this emergency and receiving evaluation and treatment for a possible stroke. This Nurse Aide deserves to be commended for her ability to respond quickly and responsibly in an emergency situation. My mother called her 'my guardian angel.'"

People do matter!

Gutsy, out-of-the-box approach yields dramatic results for Extended Home Care

It's true that desperate times call for desperate measures. We learned just that lesson in the spring of 2001, when turnover rates among our companion and aide staff reached a staggering 53% and were still rising.

None of our existing efforts seemed to have any effect. So we decided to throw out the rulebook and try something unheard of - ask for help from the very companies that compete with us for staff.

Now, three years, two grants, and one major collaborative effort later, VNA Extended Home Care has hit the lowest turnover rate in its 10-year history - 11%. We also recently won the "People Do Matter" Award from the Pittsburgh Human Resources Association, in recognition of our success.

Lay down your arms

We started by forming the Indiana County Healthcare Career Consortium, comprised of CEOs and directors from all the health care recruitment players in our community: Indiana Regional Medical Center; human services agencies such as the Indiana County CareNet; schools such as Indiana University of Pennsylvania and Westmoreland County Community College, and economic development agencies such as the Chamber of Commerce and the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board.

The all-volunteer group meets once a month to discuss ways to close the 17,000-position job gap in Indiana. In the early months of 2002, we quickly identified direct care workers (that is, the

nurses, aides, and companions who are actually in the home with the patient) as the greatest area of need, and focused on this group. With the VNA's share of two grants - one from the local Workforce Investment Board and a second as part of a five-state, \$15 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - we began to make significant changes at Extended Care:

1. *We moved employees to full-time.* In 2001, all of our Extended Care staff were part-time, minimum wage. We have incrementally added several full-time positions a year, bringing us to 50% full-time, 50% part-time. Two critical added benefits were a new system of earned paid leave time and a modest weekend bonus. These changes weren't cheap, but turnover is expensive. We estimate that it costs \$600-800 for each employee we recruit, hire, and train, not including the hours spent by the HR staff to manage an employment revolving door. Even more that the direct costs were the opportunity costs. We estimate that we lost out on hundreds of cases each year that we couldn't accept because of staffing shortfalls.
2. *We collect quarterly employee satisfaction data.* Results of satisfaction surveys over three years have led us to build a career ladder and improve education opportunities, for employees who expressed a desire to make a career out of private duty home care.

To provide the recognition our staff seemed hungry for, we created a "Brag Board." We created several tiers of financial bonuses. Overall satisfaction ratings have risen from a low of 3.92 in 2002 to 4.76 out of 5 in our most recent quarter.

3. *We improved internal support and strengthened relations between field staff and agency supervisors.* When employees said they felt cut off from managers, we created better communication through weekly and monthly team meetings. We put experienced staff in charge of orientation of new hires, as preceptors, so that training goes beyond the basics to how to excel at the job.
4. *We looked beyond the workday for opportunities to celebrate and socialize.* One of our most successful efforts is the health care worker recognition luncheon, held this year for the second time. (Grant money and sponsorships offset the costs.) This year's awardees are highlighted on page three.

Hundreds more Indiana County friends and neighbors are receiving the care they need at home because we have strengthened our staff. That was our ultimate goal, and we are proud that our efforts have paid off.

(Excerpted from VNA's CEO Linda Bettinazzi, RN, "Cease Fire: Collaborating with Competitors Brings Recruitment Success," Home Care Success)

“Better Jobs” grant program helps boost retention

One of the top resources that allowed us to cut our turnover rate to 11% was the Better Jobs Better Care grant program. The \$15 million grant, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Atlantic Philanthropic, covers a national coalition of providers, consumers, and workers, all of whom are trying to change their recruiting and retention policies in the long-term care industry.

The goal is to study and test initiatives that

1. *Reduce high vacancy and turnover rates among direct care workers in all long-term care settings.*

The program helped us to determine the career ladder project and the bonus/benefits program.

2. *Raise workforce skill and quality.* Our education programs, used by 100% of RNs, have increased our staff skill level and commitment to quality.
3. *Improve quality of care to consumers.* The idea here is that employees who have top skills and feel valued by their organization will provide top level care.

Participants were chosen in five demonstration states

— Pennsylvania, Iowa, North Carolina, Oregon, and Vermont. The grants were awarded to lead agencies on behalf of coalition partners. Our project is a partnership between the Center for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE) and five regional partnerships throughout the state, of which our Indiana Health Care Careers Consortium was one.

As the culmination of this three-year project, grantors and grantees will meet in Boston on June 8-9 to discuss future sustainability of achievements. Linda Bettinazzi has been invited to represent the Pennsylvania partners.

“Comfort and compassion when it’s needed most”

That’s the “motto” of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. Because the VNA’s Hospice and Palliative Care division’s services are growing significantly, more and more people are receiving the support they need to face the end of their lives with dignity and peace. The average number of Hospice patients on any given day has doubled in the last five years.

Although it sometimes represents a wrenching decision for the patient, the family, and the physician, the sooner a person enters Hospice, the sooner he/she comes into the care of a comprehensive Hospice team. Symptom relief, dietary advice, spiritual support, and respite visits (to relieve the fulltime caregiver) are all Hospice services. Again and again, grateful families tell us that when anxiety and pain are relieved, loved ones can engage in the conversations and decisions which bring life to a peaceful conclusion.

In a report from the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), satisfaction rates submitted by our patients’ families were significantly higher than either the state or national average in all categories. Results from the last quarter of 2005 showed that we are truly fulfilling our mission to those facing life’s closure. In six key areas, satisfaction responses were 100% “excellent” or “very good”:

100% received the right amount of pain medication

100% received the right amount of help with shortness of breath

100% reported that overall care was excellent/very good

100% rated the evening/weekend staff as excellent/very good

100% rated overall team members as excellent/very good

100% said they would recommend Hospice to others

We thank the people who shared their thoughts about the care they received, and we renew our commitment, day after day, to our compassionate mission.

“The warmth and caring will remain in our hearts forever”

“It is true...

*We must resolve to be tender with the young,
compassionate with the aged,
sympathetic with the striving,
and tolerant with the weak...*

because in our lives, we will have been all of these.

It is with gratitude that I write to express our family’s appreciation for the *compassion*, love, and support that the personnel in the Visiting Nurse Association provide for my beloved father. Over the past years, we have experienced a wide range of your services... when both my parents received your care in their home in Indiana, as well as at St. Andrew’s Village Court, where my father moved after the death of my mother.

Adjusting to transition and change is never an easy task, yet all those persons connected with VNA have embraced our family with thoughtful, kind words and deeds to carry us through our health challenges and needs. These thoughtful acts and kinds words may pass in a moment, but the warmth and caring behind them remain in our hearts forever.

We are particularly thankful for the opportunity for my father to return to his apartment [after staying at a nursing home and in the hospital]. Although he is weak and suffers multiple afflictions, with the help of around-the-clock VNA Extended Home Care, he and we continue to have hope by providing independence to Dad...a gift that is priceless when all else seems to be declining. I praise all those at VNA and wish much happiness, health, and love to you all.”

Letter from the daughter of a patient receiving both Home Health and Extended Home Care

Medicare home healthcare benefit endangered again

Home healthcare has been covered by Medicare from its beginnings in 1965. Visiting nurse agencies across the country provide highly technical medical care every day to millions of people who are homebound with the most chronic, fragile, and costly conditions.

Unfortunately for Medicare patients, federal policy severely limits the use of home healthcare by refusing to cover many innovative homecare technologies that patients want, such as the telehealth monitoring which our VNA employs with such success. We and other VNA's have proven that telehealth monitoring keeps patients out of the hospital.

The Medicare home health benefit has been under continual and consistent attack by a few

of the most powerful healthcare policy makers and advisors in Washington. As a result, Congress has frozen or reduced inflation adjustments for the Medicare home health reimbursement in four of the past five years.

The leadership of three national organizations with which the VNA of Indiana County is affiliated sent a letter to Jim Nussle, Chairman of the Budget Committee of the U. S. House of Representatives, rejecting the proposed freeze on Medicare home health care funding. The National Association for Home Care and Hospice, the American Association for Homecare, and the Visiting Nurse Associations of America noted that home health care as a share of Medicare spending has declined from 8.7%

to 3.8%. This decline has had a profound impact on beneficiaries' access to care.

If you would like to see a full copy of the letter, please call us at 724/463-6546, ext. 265.

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Profiles in Giving

Funds Development update

A \$75,000 gift from an anonymous source is underwriting the launch of the VNA's newest program, an innovative synthesis of all of the agency's services. Geriatric Care Management is our plan to meet one of the most complex needs facing our community and region: How to provide quality, affordable home care to the burgeoning elder population. We know that seniors want to live safely and independently at home. But those who are frail, disabled, or living with chronic conditions are at great risk for acute illness and injury, which then requires the most expensive services - emergency room visits, hospital admissions, and nursing home

placements. Seventy percent of all health care services in the US are consumed by this population, yet their at-home risks can be greatly reduced through improved chronic-care services such as adequate household support services (shopping, cleaning, laundry), personal care services (bathing, dressing, ambulation) and care oversight (medication monitoring and family care coordination). Watch for further information about Geriatric Care Management, in future newsletters and on our website, or call Extended Care for help at 724/463-6340.

The Geriatric Care Management program will also be supported by **a \$5,000 grant from the Dominion**

Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Dominion Peoples Gas Company.

The Indiana County Endowment of The Pittsburgh Foundation gave a \$5,000 grant in December, 2005, for personal care supplies for Hospice patients. The need for incontinence supplies is a humble but very important one. Recognizing the expense for families, Hospice had decided several years ago to purchase supplies in bulk, at a discount, using charitable contributions. With the Indiana County Endowment's leadership gift, more resources can be devoted to other unfunded needs.

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How do you want to be remembered?

For most planned giving donors, tax advantages are the least consideration

A quick glance at current bestseller lists reveals the popularity of books about “the purpose of life.” Cultural critics seize on the proliferation of such books and journals as evidence of a readership longing for direction and meaning. In fact, it can be tough, at any age, to get our arms around the “big questions” such as “What am I here for?”

In our interaction with VNA patients, we often see that these questions loom larger for older adults grappling with loss - loss of good health, loss of a spouse, loss of mobility and independence. As they move beyond the roles that occupied their entire adult lives - parent, spouse, career professional - they start to review their lives and rethink everything:

Have I been a good parent/friend/boss?

What was my biggest accomplishment?

My biggest disappointment?

What could I have done differently?

As potentially troubling as such questions can be, they frequently (and hopefully) lead to a deeply satisfying inventory of one’s life. When you can look back on your life with pride, you can face the future with integrity and peace.

You can also determine the legacy you want to leave - not by default, but by planning to be remembered for the things you valued most. A thoughtful estate plan, made with the help of a professional, gives you a chance to play an active role in the future. You can create a vehicle that has the potential to influence people beyond your lifetime.

In recent years, the VNA has reported on bequests it was privileged to receive from people whose lives were touched by our compassionate services. We have also provided information about the tax savings to be realized by

prudent wealth management. As attractive as these advantages are, they pale in comparison with the power to set in motion a series of events or memories which live on after us. At the VNA, we are committed to improving the life of every person in our care, no matter what the age or life expectancy. We hope that we can play a part, when needed, in the process by which older adults find renewed meaning in the events, people, places, and relationships of their life’s journey.

To help you get started

If you have been contemplating a life review or an end-of-life plan but don’t know where to start, we encourage you to request a copy of Five Wishes. It’s a free workbook, published by an organization called Aging with Dignity, that leads you through questions and considerations. It’s a fascinating exercise, and you’ll be so glad you did it. To receive a copy, please call us at 724/463-6546, ext. 265.

Profiles in Giving

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A \$4,000 grant from the Bork Family Fund, part of the Community Foundation for the Alleghenies, is underwriting part of this year’s telehealth monitoring for diabetics. The VNA’s telehealth monitoring program, one of the largest in the East, is primarily geared to patients with congestive heart failure, one of the most difficult and costly conditions we see. We are placing the monitors with a growing number of diabetics, using special cables which allow patients to transmit the results of home blood tests to the central station in the VNA offices. Results are analyzed frequently,

every day, and problems are addressed immediately.

The Garden Tour takes a vacation: After seven years of hard work on a popular event, the members of the Indiana Garden Club are taking a well-deserved break this year from the demands of staging the “Hope in Bloom” Garden Tour. This event has been a successful fundraiser and friend-raiser for the agency, for which we thank inaugural Tour Coordinator Alice O’Dell, most recent Tour Coordinator Claire Valletta, the entire Garden Club, more than 65 Garden Site Hosts,

and our Preview Reception Hosts. Taking a year off will also enable the Funds Development Division to devote more time to the grantseeking efforts which have brought thousands of dollars in support from outside the Indiana community.

Overall, gifts and grants to the VNA as of March 31 are up nearly 10% over last year’s revenues in the same period. We have received more than \$235,000 in support of our compassionate mission. On behalf of the patients who benefit, we thank our donors for their loyal support.

AT YOUR DOOR

Check this out!

- Add it:**
I know someone who should get this - name and address attached.
- Fix it:**
Correct the information on my mailing label as indicated.
- Count it:**
Save a tree! Please send only one copy to this address.
- Cut it:**
Please remove my name from your mailing list.

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VNA passes CHAP accreditation with flying colors!



After preparing for several months for an accreditation survey in June, we were surprised when the surveyors arrived unannounced on May 8th! Surprised but ready. The Community Health Assessment Program (CHAP) is an independent, non-profit accrediting body whose goal is to elevate the quality of community health care in the U.S. Accreditation certifies that the VNA has voluntarily met the highest standards for home and community-based health care. In its report in the spring of 2003, CHAP noted as a chief organizational strength the integration of technology and telemedicine with the historic traditions of the VNA's home care services. Again with this visit, the CHAP team reported that it received "100% positive feedback" from all of the people interviewed - staff, board, and patients. Citing the "professional care provision and also a huge amount of caring" in the agency, and an "excellent and comprehensive self-study," the surveyors commented that, on a scale of 1 to 10, "VNA services would fall extremely close to a 10!" In particular, because of the recruitment and retention initiatives detailed inside (pp. 4-5), Extended Home Care was awarded the highest rating of commendation.