A Message from the President

Greetings:

I hope you had a very enjoyable summer. We are very fortunate in the Philadelphia region to have escaped the severe destruction of the recent powerful hurricanes. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those impacted by these terrible storms.

I want to address the evolution of the American consumer that now has implications on our home health and hospice programs. Almost everything you can buy today has some type of rating system associated with it. In the past, movies were probably among the first items to be rated by the various critics. A good rating increased attendance at the theatres, while a bad rating hastened the release to cable television or other media. Now, every purchase is governed by some rating source fueled by a large extent by the easy access to the internet. Cars, hotels, restaurants, appliances, household items, professional services, home repair contractors and consumer goods have readily available ratings that consumers frequently access prior to making a purchase.

Now, this consumer oriented approach has become a key factor in the delivery of all healthcare services. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) is the largest purchaser of healthcare services in the world. CMS has implemented a rating system for home health that covers patient quality outcomes and patient satisfaction. Now, CMS is working on similar scoring systems for hospices with the recent release of quality outcome data for hospices and the promise of the release of the first hospice patient satisfaction data in early 2019.

In addition, CMS has introduced a demonstration program for value based purchasing for home health in nine states that will link Medicare’s payment levels to the agency’s quality outcomes and patient satisfaction scores. As you can imagine, agencies in those nine states, which excludes Pennsylvania, are working hard on improving their scores.

We are also focused on improving our ratings as well in both home health and hospice. We have an extensive program underway to create a culture of great customer service for our patients and our referral sources. We are training everyone to be responsive to the needs of our patients in the most caring and responsive way. We are reviewing all of our operations to make sure they are user friendly, effective and efficient. We want to be our patient’s first choice for care!

We are also working on seeing our patients as fast as possible. We understand the anxiety patients face when they leave the hospital and want them to know we are there to meet their care needs. To improve this process, we have used outside experts to streamline the admission process. We have centralized home health clinician scheduling in order to see patients faster. In addition, we are concentrating on assisting our patients to avoid hospital readmissions. After a hospital stay, no one really wants to be readmitted. We are analyzing the root causes of readmissions and changing our practices to avoid them.

Overall, our goal is a happier and healthier patient. I am sure everyone will agree on that goal. Thank you for supporting us. We really appreciate your assistance.

Sincerely,

Walter W. Borginis, III
President and CEO
Dear Alison and the VNA Hospice Team,

Many thanks for your collective note of sympathy on the passing of my mother. You helped keep things under control (if such a thing be said) and to understand the process/transition were experiencing. Special thanks to you, Maggie, Aileen, and Carmel for your caring and straight talk. That seems a funny combination, but I appreciated it very much. You were a tremendous help and we're very appreciative. Many heartfelt thanks,

J and A

To all the people who took care of my F. We thought the world of all of you. When you came you brightened his days. You were all his guardian angels. I want to say thanks for all you did for him. I know sometimes he was a tough cookie. There are no words how much he will be missed.

Thank you,

T

VNA NEWS

Elwood (Woody) Hungarter, RN, BSN, MS joins VNA Philadelphia as Chief Operating Officer

A warm welcome to Elwood (Woody) Hungarter, RN, BSN, MS, who has been named the agency’s new Chief Operating Officer. Our President and CEO Walt Borginis says, “Woody is a great addition for us. He has great clinical experience in both home health and hospice as well as a first hand entrepreneurial outlook on strengthening and growing our operations. He will have a lot to contribute to our efforts to continuously improve our programs.”

Woody was most recently the Administrator of HCR Manor Care/Heartland Home Care and Hospice in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania where he was responsible for the success of the agency by every measure.

For his role in the newly created COO position, Woody will also serve as the director of Clinical Operations overseeing all aspects of the home-health care, palliative, and hospice care that VNA Philadelphia provides. The job was created as the Agency rededicates itself to ensuring that our constituents: our patients and their families, our referral sources, and our employees experience the VNA Difference in care. “Providing home health and hospice is a unique field,” he notes. “We provide care to people at their most vulnerable time in their lives.”

Woody lives in Quakertown on a 10 acre farm with his wife, Donna, their Australian Shepherd puppy, Rylee, and an assortment of horses, cats, fish, and other wildlife.

We're also delighted to introduce you to our new Vice President of Human Resources, Amy Sloan.

Amy Sloan has been working in the non-profit sector her entire career, wearing a few different hats. She is a graduate of the University of Connecticut and is a member of SHRM, (Society for Human Resources Management) and the Society of Professional Women. She has served on numerous Boards of Directors and Advisory boards. In her 25 years with non-profits, Amy has held the title of Director of Development for a preparatory school, a land conservation organization and United Way of Dutchess and Ulster Counties, and was President and CEO of the Mid-Hudson Civic Center, all while living in Millbrook, NY. Eight years ago, she moved to this area and became the Director of Resource Development for Liberty Resources, Philadelphia’s Center for Independent Living, where she oversaw the departments of Human Resources, Organizational Development and Training, Communication and Fundraising, and Administrative Supports. In addition to Amy's roles in non-profits, she also owned an inn in Great Falls, MT, and a Curves franchise.

Amy has two children - Lindsey is 28, lives in Boston and works for Deloitte, and Carter is 27, lives in Philly, and works for Liberty Resources. Now that her children are grown, she is overly obsessed with her 2-year-old rescue dog, Lily. She and her fiancé live in Cherry Hill, NJ and own a home in Wildwood, where she spends every possible weekend from April through October. Cooking, traveling, boating, swimming and reading are her favorite past times.
How did you get started in Hospice?

I had been a paralegal for 18 years when I became divorced with a young daughter. I knew I needed a better income so I went to nursing school while still working part-time at the law office. They were kind enough to continue my full benefits even though I was PT, and my parents watched my daughter when I was working or at school, so I was very lucky that way. I found that I loved geriatrics. When I was in a nursing home, a hospice rep would see me with patients and encourage me to try hospice. I started as a per diem hospice nurse. From there I was a hospice marketer, then a homecare liaison at Temple, then Hospice Liaison for 12 years, went back to school and became a Nurse Practitioner in 2015 (all of this with the VNA), and became the Sr. Vice President of Hospice of Philadelphia in July when Jane Feinman retired. She and I actually started here at the same time!

What is your favorite part of your job?

I really like working with staff and patients. I like being in the position now where I can make changes to help us improve and be better than we already are - to be the best hospice and provide that great care for families.

What do you like to do in your free time?

I crochet blankets (especially baby blankets) and scarves. It’s really relaxing for me. And I like to spend time with my family (husband and three children; one getting married in the fall, one about to start college, and one in high school).

What advice would you have for someone just starting in Hospice?

You need to be able to embrace death as a part of life. Not everyone can do hospice. You need to check yourself - make sure you are comfortable with death and dying before you get started in hospice. And definitely maintain your sense of humor. It will help get you through the rough times.

What is something we don’t know about you yet?

I’m a Disney freak! I was married there in 1997, and rode up in the Cinderella carriage. I’ve visited Disneyland over 50 times, usually 2 times a year. My children were raised on Disney. And my family knows I love all Super Hero movies!

I want our Volunteers to know I have an Open Door Policy! Stop in anytime with a question or concern or just to say Hi! I’d love to meet you.

Hospice Memorial Service

Please join us for our Hospice Memorial Service to be held on Wednesday, October 25, 2017, at VNA Philadelphia in the Falls Center Auditorium, 3300 Henry Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19129.

Registration is at 5pm and the service will begin at 5:30pm.

We invite you to join us as we celebrate the memory of our patients who have died between March 2017 through August 2017.

The invitation is also extended to those who have lost a loved one on our service during the past year.

You are invited to bring a small memento of your loved one to display. We encourage honoring the memory of your loved one during the service by sharing reflections, poetry, music or something meaningful to you.

Light refreshments will be served following the service.

For more information contact Lori Collins at 215-581-2181.

Thank you for taking care of my brother, K, and making him comfortable. Thank you for making my brother smile and laugh again.

The C Family

The family of L wishes to acknowledge with deep appreciation the many expressions of love, concern, and kindness shown to them during this hour of bereavement. Especially the staff at the VNA Hospice of Philadelphia. May God bless you and keep you.

The G-B Family
Our first priority is you, our patients and families not our stockholders...because we don’t have any. We are a nonprofit, charitable, 501(c)3 home-healthcare and hospice agency. We’re not a franchise, we’re not a corporate subsidiary. We’re a charity that has been trusted to serve the Philadelphia community for the past 131 years. Throughout our rich history, we’ve focused solely on patients’ health. We’re the true pioneer of public-health nursing. We’re your trusted resource for helping you navigate difficult healthcare decisions.

Selecting the right nursing care for yourself or a family member is one of the most important decisions you’ll ever make. You have a lot of choices. How do you know that you’re making the right one? Start by asking yourself what you are looking for in nursing care. Skill, yes, experience and knowledge, of course. But do you want more than that? Are you looking for a home-nursing agency that will care for the whole person, the whole family, and the whole community? We’re your partner.

When patients require care for chronic or acute illnesses, we have many options to help them stay at home. Our clinicians see between 1100 and 1200 patients every day in the five county Philadelphia metro area. Nurses, physical, occupational, and speech therapists; social workers and home-health aides promote recovery, maximize independence in daily living activities, and teach patients and families how to manage chronic illness. Healthcare decisions involve many tough choices. We’re here as a longstanding member of the community to offer options and help you respect your loved one’s wishes.

Our physician-led palliative-care program provides expert symptom management as well as compassionate nurse practitioners, social workers, and chaplains. They are experts in discussing and selecting the right care plan for you.

If the time comes for hospice care, VNA Philadelphia empowers patients and families to make informed choices about fulfilling their remaining days. A coordinated program of services enables patients to live fully and comfortably wherever they call home, including nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. We understand that family members may feel overwhelmed when caring for a terminally ill loved one. We provide care that addresses that patient’s and the family’s physical, spiritual, and emotional needs.

VNA Philadelphia also supports the bereaved and helps them cherish the memory of their loved one. Everyone has access to our support services. We hold special services throughout the year—a tree lighting in the winter and a butterfly release in the spring—to honor those who have passed.

Our difference, what sets us apart, what makes us the best, is the compassionate care of our people. We’ll respond to you quickly when you need us. We’ll be your partner day or night. We’ll take good care of your loved one and we’ll take care of you, too.
Our Interfaith Chaplain Support

At VNA Philadelphia, we know our clinicians provide the best health care, palliative, and hospice care but sometimes our patients and their families need more than physical care, they need spiritual care as well. We have an incredible team of spiritual support who is there for them.

Our Chaplains, Laura Barry, Brian Bower, Rita Milburn Dobson, Donna Geiger, James Ingalls, Maureen Joos, Ron Kinsey, Twana Malone, Ann Schlossnagle, and Rabbi Yaakov Stolberg are all specially trained and educated in their field.

Common reasons people may turn to a Chaplain for support include when looking for emotional comfort and companionship, when facing ethical dilemmas or making important decisions, when feeling helpless or depressed, when wanting the comfort of prayer or rituals, when seeking solace through sacred writings, for assistance with reconciliation, to foster connection with the divine, and for assistance with funeral or memorial services.

Chaplains meet with patients and families in homes, in hospitals, at our office... wherever is most convenient for the people seeking spiritual support.

Our Chaplains also work with patients who are unable to communicate verbally. The Chaplains use a specially designed communication tool, with which patients can express themselves, by selecting large and easy to read images and words from a board. A voice for the voiceless during a time of spiritual need.

Our beautiful evergreen tree is lit with beautiful white lights and is transformed in the winter.

SAVE THE DATE

It’s a beautiful warm September day as we are going to print with this edition of VNA Philadelphia’s Vital Signs, but we’d like to invite you to Hold the Date for our annual Hospice Tree Lighting Ceremony on Thursday, December 7, 2017 at 5:00pm here at 3300 Henry Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19129.

It’s a beautiful, outdoor memorial service orchestrated by our Hospice Team, including Social Workers, Chaplains, and Bereavement Coordinators. Following the ceremony, everyone is invited inside for refreshments and conversations.

To say thank you just does not touch the surface of how I felt about all of you. Your loving kindness and thoughtfulness means so much to me and all of my family for the excellent care you provided for my husband. He told me life goes on and so it does, but I will try to remember if I feel sad to just think about something funny he once said and I begin to laugh. Look for me, I plan to stop in.

T.B.

To VNA Hospice,

Our thanks to all nurses, doctors, CNAs, and all staff while caring for our sister, C, in the last days of her life. We are eternally grateful.

N, J, G, and B
New Diabetes Specialty Program

VNA Philadelphia has a number of unique specialty programs, including Wound Care, Incontinence, Psych, and Cardio Care. We’re proud to announce that next, we will be launching a specialty program on Diabetes. We want to be the premier provider of diabetes care, information, and education in the community just as we are in the other specialty areas.

Diabetes affects 37.5% (or more) of our patient population. It is more prevalent in African American and Hispanic communities. Approximately 60.7% of patients of VNA Philadelphia are African American. Most of our patients with Diabetes also have co-morbidities related to the disease. Complications of Diabetes occur from nerve and blood vessel damage. These include: cardiovascular problems, neuropathies, diabetic ulcer, retinal damage that can lead to blindness, and kidney damage that could result in the need for dialysis. This is why it’s so important to educate people about their risk for Diabetes and help them to stay healthy.

Amy Bergels, RN, (pictured left) is leading the way on the program and becoming the Agency’s Certified Diabetes Educator. The program will be composed of a number of elements, including helping people learn what their Hemoglobin A1C number is, and how that number affects their risk for developing Diabetes. Hbg A1C is the tool the community uses to determine the treatment plan for managing Diabetes and one of the first indicators of a pre Diabetic condition.

Additional components of the Diabetes specialty program will include...blood glucose monitoring, community education events and VNA Philadelphia’s participation in community health fairs. Important information to disseminate includes the role of nutrition and exercise in managing diabetes.

VNA Back to School Campaign

This year, once again, VNA Philadelphia staff members donated backpacks (23 of them!) and filled them with all kind of school supplies for some of the children or grandchildren of our patients.

Our clinicians identified the families who needed a little help this year, we collected items, filled the backpacks and the clinicians delivered them to our patients in their home.

It’s one of the outreaches to our community that distinguishes us from every other agency! Our reward is seeing some of the smiling faces of the kids!

Like us on Facebook and Follow us on Twitter!

How does using social media help us? Lots of ways! Mostly it helps people make decisions about choosing to use our agency for their health-care needs for their loved one. The better they get to know us, the more they understand that it’s our compassionate care that makes the VNA difference! We want everyone to receive our care when they need it.

Social media also gives people the opportunity to see all the things we are doing as an agency. Because we’re a nonprofit charity, we rely on donations from individuals, companies, and foundations. Our social-media presence is a real-time way to keep people informed about our activities and it’s a way to promote our agency’s events.

Our website (www.vnaphilly.org) is also a tool people can use to learn about our agency, our people, and our events. Check us out!
Suraj Patel became a Hospice of Philadelphia Volunteer in October of 2015. He is in a Post-Baccalaureate program at Drexel University College of Medicine with plans to attend medical school. He works as a scribe for Penn Ophthalmology. And he visits our patients in the community, with a bicycle as his primary means of transportation.

**What brought you to VNA Hospice of Philadelphia to volunteer?**

I had just moved to Philadelphia and was new to the area. For me, part of comfortably situating myself in a new environment involved community work or giving back in some way. So, when I moved here, I was looking for an opportunity to further this work. The VNA seemed like a great fit, especially with the chance to work with a novel population in a healthcare environment.

**What is your favorite part of being a Volunteer?**

My favorite aspect is the time spent and conversations had with these individuals. It is refreshing to speak with folks and hear their life stories, especially learning new perspectives with much wiser and older individuals. Lastly, I feel rewarded knowing that I have had a positive impact on the individual and made their day even a little more enjoyable.

**What do you like to do in your free time?**

During my free time, when I’m not studying or working, I love riding my bike, sitting in the park, enjoying sunshine. I also love to cook and experiment in the kitchen with new cuisines or recipes. Currently my main hobby is growing my plants and acquiring new ones to add to my collection.

**What advice would you have for a new Volunteer? What do you know NOW that you wish you’d know when you first started as a VNA Hospice of Philadelphia Volunteer?**

To a new volunteer, I would say that you may feel awkward or uncomfortable at first, especially if working with elderly or hospice individuals for the first time. But be assured that it is just an adjustment that needs a bit of time.

**What is something you’d like us to know about you?**

I would like to express that volunteering for the VNA has been an enriching experience that has taught me a great deal about compassion, empathy, death, and the dying process. I hope to take what I have learned with my time at the VNA and apply it to a future career in medicine.

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**Patient Satisfaction Survey and Star Ratings**

For the past 131 years, VNA Philadelphia has been dedicated to providing home-health (and more recently) end-of-life care of the highest quality to all people. We are committed to re-focusing our efforts on improving the satisfaction of three major groups of people who make decisions based on survey scores: our patients and their families; our referral sources; and our employees.

We’ll begin at the beginning. From the very first person who answers the very first phone call inquiring about our services to the very last clinician who discharges a patient from our care, and everyone else in between, we’ll deliver 5 Star Rated customer service. We’ll have specific standards, behaviors, and words we use consistently that will lead to increased satisfaction. We’ll strengthen and educate our managers to reinforce service standards, we’ll coach clinical and nonclinical staff, and restructure our organizational initiatives. Following the implementation of our renewed dedication to improving survey scores, we’ll vigilantly monitor and evaluate results. We’ll revise where we need to. We’ll also add standards, behaviors, and scripts as necessary to continuously improve.

We have already created a Committee made up of clinical and nonclinical staff that will serve as the leaders of this cultural change. Representatives from all agency departments, including home health, finance, hospice, fundraising, human resources, and social workers have all been carefully selected to build support from our colleagues to ensure success. Every member of team VNA Philadelphia has a role to play in increasing consumer satisfaction.

We’re committed to Service Excellence!