A Message from the President

Greetings:

As the Thanksgiving holiday has passed and the December holiday season approaches, it is usually a very good time to think about the many things we are truly thankful for and how they enrich our lives. At the VNA, three key groups quickly come to mind. As you know, the VNA has provided the most caring and effective services in the homes of our patients for over 131 years now. Those services are so outstanding due to the remarkable efforts of our great staff. We would not exist without their dedication and expertise. Our patients would really struggle without their care. In this issue, we have devoted a section to those honored at our annual service awards. We recognize and congratulate our colleagues that have reached their work anniversaries from 5 to 35 years at the VNA. They personify the very essence of the VNA with their great work and dedication toward improving the lives of our patients. In a sense, they represent ordinary people doing the most extraordinary things. We salute the caring work that they do and we are grateful for their many years of service. We are very fortunate to have such dedicated and compassionate staff. We receive many letters from our patients complimenting their care.

In addition, we are thankful for our many donors. With their support, we are able to seek better solutions for solving the many complex health issues our patients face. Through donated support, we are able to develop, define and launch new programs targeted at the most pressing health issues we see as prevalent in the area’s population. These programs include managing cardiac disease, wound care, diabetes and mental health issues. Given our 131 years in the Philadelphia community, the VNA along with its physician and hospital partners is best suited to identify and resolve these pressing health issues. In addition, donor support allows us to provide the many extra services for our patients as highlighted in each edition of these newsletters. These items include food baskets, pet and music therapy and other patient needs not funded by others. We strive to meet all of the patient’s needs, not just the medical. This is a striking part of the VNA difference that makes us truly unique and wonderful. We are able to use donor support to truly make a great difference in the lives of patients and their families. We help to personify a caring community concerned about everyone’s welfare. You cannot have a higher mission than that! I also thank our Board for maintaining this great mission for so long.

Finally, we are thankful for the many partners we have in providing our care. This group includes our referral sources, our neighboring hospitals and the physicians, who not only request our services but also help us to constantly focus on improving what we do to meet their needs as well as the needs of our mutual patients. It takes the efforts of the whole healthcare community to keep a population healthy and thriving and we are happy to be a part of this vibrant and dedicated group.

Best wishes for a wonderful holiday season and a great 2018!

Sincerely,

Walter W. Borginis, III
President and CEO
There’s a house at 1308 Ontario Street right across the street from Temple University Hospital in the heart of North Philadelphia. It’s old and charming with all kinds of odd angles and interesting details in its stairs, carpentry and masonry. You can’t help but think “if these walls could talk” when you walk in the door. How many families have lived here over the years? What meals have been shared? What conversations have been had in these rooms?

These days, it is home to our phenomenal Palliative Care Team. Palliative Care is a specialty that is often misunderstood. Frequently, people think palliative care is the same as hospice, but it’s not. A patient receiving palliative care is receiving comfort measures, but can also be receiving curative treatment at the same time.

Three doctors, a Nurse Practitioner, a Chaplain, and three Social Workers start each day with a meeting where they come together talk about the patients who are receiving palliative care and decide on a course of action to present to the family.

Right after the morning meeting, the team heads across the street to the hospital. Each member is taking care of specific patients and families and in constant contact with each other (by text) as the morning speeds by with consultations in hospital rooms, calls to Case Managers, visits by Chaplains, whatever needs to be done.

Most team members go back to the house around lunch time to update each other on the endlessly fluid rhythm of the day. Families cancelling meetings or rescheduling them, a patient who has unexpectedly been discharged, a family meeting where the team has to help people come to terms with an imminent death and bearing witness to the tears, the anger, the disbelief, that sometimes accompany that news. Putting caring arms around heaving shoulders, finding tissues and bottles of water, speaking softly. Each and every family is given the gift of being the one and only thing on our team’s mind.

The afternoon brings everyone back to the hospital and the delicate pattern of care is repeated over and over. Fast moving, yet well choreographed, the team works together to provide the compassionate care that is the VNA Philadelphia Difference.

Our team members help people make decisions. Navigating an unfamiliar hospital environment, dealing with insurance policies, needing spiritual care, worrying about a loved one or your family when you are the patient, these can all be very difficult challenges.

At the end of the workday, most team members head home to their families and routine household duties...kids are driven to sports practice, dogs are walked, dinner is made, laundry is folded, some TV is watched...all the little, tiny pieces that make up our days. And tomorrow, our team will get up and do this all again. Caring for yet another set of families.
VNA Philadelphia has an extraordinary dedication to caring for the veterans in our community. We are the premier and award-winning Agency of Choice for veterans because of our special, dedicated programs for veterans and their families.

In celebration of Veterans Day, we once again returned to the VA Hospital as we do every year. Our team brought doughnuts, coffee, and the hands-down patient favorite, hot chocolate! Escorted by VA Hospital staffers, our colleagues Donna Geiger (Head Chaplain), Jill Morrisroe (Director of Marketing) and Bob Haley (Veterans Liaison) walked the halls and went in to every patient’s room to shake hands, say thank you for serving our country, and to give each veteran a card that had been signed by other VNA staff members. They also gave each veteran (and all family members who were present) an American flag pin.

All of the gentlemen, and two ladies, were so appreciative that they were being acknowledged and remembered. There were emotional moments when the veterans thanked VNA Philadelphia for thanking them!

VNA Philadelphia was the first hospice program in the city to earn a first and eventually a fourth star, the highest rating achieved from the We Honor Veterans Appreciation Program. In partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, the program has been meeting the special needs of veterans through:

- Staff training and development in post-traumatic stress syndrome and other issues
- Coordination with the VA to identify all available benefits
- VNA-designed Resource Guide that explains services in the community for patients and their families
- Pairing a volunteer who is a veteran with a veteran hospice patient for visitation, companionship, and emotional support
- Holiday cards sent to the veterans and their families
- Presentation of a certificate of appreciation and a U.S. flag pin
- Acknowledgement during a semi-annual memorial service after hospice ends
- Participation in forums to educate the community about home health end-of-life care for veterans

For more information on our Veterans Program, call Bob Haley at 610-570-9808 or email him at rhaley@vnaphilly.org.
Ceveloping Veterans Day in our office

This year, in honor of Veterans Day, in addition to visiting patients at the Philadelphia VA Hospital, we also invited our colleagues to share pictures of their loved ones who are serving or who have served in the military.

We received a wonderful response and proudly displayed the photos in our lobby for everyone to see.

Celebrating Veterans Day in our office

In honor of Veterans Day, the staff of the VNA had pictures of their loved ones who are currently serving, or have served, in the military prominently displayed.

Hospice Memorial Service

Twice a year, our Hospice team’s Social Workers, Chaplains, and Bereavement Coordinator organize a very special memorial service for the loved ones of people who passed while in our care during this past year. This October’s Hospice Memorial Service was particularly moving. There were special mementos for all participants, candles, music (performed by our Chaplain Ann and our Bereavement Coordinator Zac) and special readings.

It’s a beautiful opportunity for family, friends, and VNA Philadelphia staff members to come together to remember loved ones and receive comfort together.

Hospice Memorial Service

Keepsake program given to family members at the Memorial Service

Candlelight is part of the service
Hurricane Relief for Puerto Rico

When the catastrophic Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in September, VNA Philadelphia went into action! Luis Reyes, who is on our Facilities Team, let us know that his church was collecting nonperishable food and a laundry list of personal-care items. We placed collection boxes on both floors of the Agency and they were filled with donations daily. Baby food, Pedialyte, diapers, toothbrushes and paste, flashlight batteries, peanut butter, plastic utensils, hand sanitizer, canned meat and fish, milk powder, bags of rice, soap...just about everything...was collected over the course of a week.

The week of October 6th also launched a cash-donation drive to help defray the cost of shipping the goods to the island. We had a hot-dog sale at the beginning of the week and a Puerto Rican foods lunch at the end of the week. All together, our colleagues raised more than $1,200 and literally a truck load of items!

Our team members really are the VNA Philadelphia Difference!

Hospice Tree Lighting Memorial Ceremony Highlights

It was one of the most beautiful ceremonies of the season. On Thursday, December 7th, we held our annual Hospice Memorial Tree Lighting Ceremony. The service was led by our Chaplain, Donna Geiger, our Social Worker, Craig Hindman, and our Bereavement Coordinator, Zac Adams. Joining them to celebrate and memorialize the lives of loved ones was our Social Worker Joanna Vanore and the choir of the United States Postal Service.

Songs and special readings were followed by everyone stepping out of the auditorium and into the cold, dark of evening to bear witness to the lighting of the tree. Over the years, our evergreen has grown tall and it has become a truly beautiful sight to see it all ablaze in white lights. Each light symbolizing someone who has passed while in our care, the onlookers held candles as readings were recited.

After the solemn remembrance, everyone came back inside for fellowship and refreshments and entertainment by the Choir. There were some tears, some laughter, and a lot of hugs.
We recently honored our colleagues who are celebrating milestone years of service to VNA Philadelphia with a breakfast for all staff and awards for the celebrants who ranged in 5 to 35 years of employment. Walter Borginis, President and CEO congratulates the following employees:

5 Years

Christine Harding
Cathy LaSpina
Anna Mills
Ellen Meehan
Maggie Mongeau

10 Years

Wanda Rodriguez
Yasmin Salaam
Anne Valpey
Joanna Vanore
Esther Amadi

15 Years

Trish Ingelsby
Toni Lockett
Dawn Michelizzi
Osiris Naverio
Josh Sullivan

20 Years

Liza Dioso
Elise Schwartz
Craig Hindman
Lavonna May
Roberta Ross-Whipple

25 Years

Cynthia Browne-Harris

30 Years

Janie McDaniel

35 Years

Tom Csaszar
Dawn King started with VNA Philadelphia in October, we sat down with her recently to get to know her a bit.

Why did you become a nurse? Who was your influence?

I remember it was my junior year in high school and I was taking an anatomy class and I realized that I had a calling to take care of people who were sick. My Mom was a nurse so I grew up familiar with the nursing-home environment. My Mom was an administrator of one, so my sister (who is also a nurse now) and I were there a lot. We’d help feed people, we called bingo, we put on recitals for the residents, we slept on couches if it was bad weather and people couldn’t get to work we’d just stay over. I’d help with scheduling and staffing, too. I learned what a breach in infection control looked like at an early age.

It was from these experiences that I knew I wanted to work with a geriatric population. I used to spend time with people who were dying and had no family. I just wanted to help people reach their maximum potential with dignity and quality of life.

What's been the most rewarding part of your job here so far?

Getting to know the people here and how much they care and want to do a good job. There’s really a lot of good people here who really care about the people we service. The people here truly believe in our mission and our vision. I am impressed with how our team is vested in the organization. It’s how I felt since day one… vested in this agency, that’s what’s been so rewarding.

What’s the hardest part?

Hearing the word “no”—that we can’t or won’t do something. It’s frustrating.

What’s the best part of your day?

The day never ends until I have learned something new or accomplished something.

What would you like people to know about you?

I’m truly about the people and about the patients. That I love solving problems and coming up with solutions. I don’t like to lose.

That I think that anything can be done when we work together as a team. Every individual can make a difference.

What should we know about you personally?

My children (two girls, 22 and 16) and my husband are my life. When I’m not at work, I’m usually watching a soccer game. Or we’re watching sports as a family. We share our home with a bulldog named Jake. Oh, and I love a good meal (she says with a smile).
Many of our readers know Olivia, our Certified Therapy Dog, from Social Media. Well, now all of the Philadelphia Metro Area knows her! Her story appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer on Tuesday, November 7, 2017...

By Stacy Burling, Staff Writer, Philadelphia Inquirer—When Olivia Mae, a 22-month-old, 10-pound, Havanese therapy dog, glides through the hospice in her doggie stroller, staff members bend down to stroke her curly fur and grin into her brown eyes. Patients and family members at the Visiting Nurse Association of Greater Philadelphia’s inpatient hospice on Henry Avenue shower her with baby talk and, if Olivia’s owner, chaplain Donna Geiger, lets them, tiny bits of cheese.

Lately, Olivia has been a bit under the weather herself, but Geiger said Olivia’s injury — she broke a foot in three places when she fell off a bed in August — has only made the dog better at her work. Her job, Geiger said, is “helping people smile” in a place where smiles are precious. Her cast and stroller have made conversations about illness richer and given people a distraction from the grief and fear in their lives.

“For that short period of time, they’re thinking about something different than their loved one being in hospice,” Geiger said.

She met her pet and coworker — Olivia has her own volunteer badge — when she was an eight-week-old, 2½-pound, $2,000 puppy in Florida. After much research, Geiger, whose last dog weighed 135 pounds, decided that a Havanese would be the perfect addition to her ministry. The American Kennel Club calls the breed, developed in Cuba, outgoing, smart, and eager to please.

Geiger had to prove to the breeder that she would be a worthy owner. Olivia has had months of training to be a therapy dog, meeting nine out of 10 standards for certification. The sticking point: conquering separation anxiety. It’s possible that Geiger, who clearly dotes on the dog and her “agape love,” may have some separation anxiety herself.

Olivia visits patients and staff at the Inpatient facility and in homes two days a week. Ultimately, she may do three, Geiger said. The two sit beside a patient or family member while people talk about faith, dogs they’ve loved, what makes them feel good in tough times (often dogs) and whatever else comes to mind. Olivia doesn’t have to do much besides love a lot of strangers eager for a soft touch. She’s a natural.

On a recent afternoon, Geiger took Olivia to see Robert Redding and his wife, Lenora Skinner. Redding’s sister, who has leukemia, was asleep, and the couple looked glum when Geiger arrived. They laughed as they talked about the dog.

“I do hope that she helped to lighten your heart a little bit,” Geiger said as she stood to leave.

“She did,” Skinner said. “She is just so beautiful.”

They also saw Rita Wilson, who was at the hospice for respite care while her husband was in the hospital. She is 70, with multiple health problems, and has outlived her doctors’ predictions. “God is using me to set a record,” she said. “Nobody can tell you when you’re going to leave here but the Lord.”

Wilson seemed the kind of person who lights up easily, and she beamed as Olivia sat next to her and accepted treats. She sang Olivia a hymn. “I know that the Lord, he’ll take care of me” she sang in a strong voice for someone on oxygen. “How about that?” she said afterward with a hearty laugh. She and Geiger sang “How Great Thou Art.” Wilson remembered how a dog she’d once owned howled along when she sang. She and Geiger clasped hands and prayed.

Wilson said she hadn’t been this close to a dog in years. She thanked Geiger for bringing Olivia, and they talked about getting together again. “I haven’t petted a dog in so long,” she said. “That was just precious. That’s a precious visit.”
The Holiday Season of 2017 was ushered in last month at Thanksgiving. It’s a special time of year for many faith traditions. We enjoy spending time with family, preparing special meals, giving each other gifts, sending greeting cards, and decorating our homes with beautiful and bright things.

We enjoy being home during this joyful time of year, it’s sometimes hard to remember that not everyone can be home. There are 15 rooms in our Inpatient Hospice Unit (IPU) and many of them will be filled during this Holiday Season. How does our exceptional team of clinicians, admins, cooks, and cleaners make this last season special for our patients and their families? Lots of ways! There’s a reason many people call our hospice team members angels!

Our IPU manager, Donna Curry, RN, says, “The presence and the spirit they bring to each patient is felt by the families. It’s what they need. They really have a way of bringing bright cheeriness to a difficult situation. We encourage families to celebrate the holidays just the way they would at home.” “We try to be as accommodating as possible. Nurses decorate the whole IPU and each patient can have their own room decorated and families can bring in food from home if they’d like.” “We want to give patients the feeling and spirit of the holidays and the aromas of the holidays.”

“It gives all of us a special feeling to take care of people at this stage of their life, especially during the holidays,” Curry says. “We look forward to celebrating with the patients, families, and each other…our work family.”

The woman overseeing the kitchen (ordering, stocking, maintaining cleanliness) that prepares all of the meals for our IPU is Safiyyah Floyd. Our kitchen is always stocked and all food can be served any time around the clock…whenever our patient wants it, and whatever it is that the patient wants.

“The holidays are really important to me. I try and out-do myself for our patients. Cooking for our patients is my favorite part of my job. Knowing that I may be preparing someone’s last meal is very special to me.” When asked what is the least favorite part of her job, Floyd replied, “I don’t really have a least favorite part. Unless you want to say when I don’t get to cook for someone. I’m happy to get up and go to work every day.”

There are usually more families and other visitors in the IPU during the holidays, Thanksgiving through New Year’s Day, and we provide meals for them as well. Floyd notes, “Feeding less than 50 people is nothing for me.” She is especially concerned about feeding elderly caregivers who may forget to eat and about the little children who visit.

On holidays, staff members share the meals like a family. They partake in all the traditional foods that Safiyyah Floyd likes to make from scratch. She notes, “We really are like a family here. And working here is bittersweet because you get close to the patients and the families. I try my best to give everyone everything they want.”
The VNA Difference

The Story of a Patient, a Nurse, and a Dog

One recent day, one of our nurses went to visit a patient and found the woman crying. The nurse asked what was wrong and the answer was that our patient had lost her dog. She had run out the door about a half an hour before our clinician arrived. Our nurse felt terrible, but went on with the visit and assessed her patient and left. Our nurse took the time to drive around the patient’s neighborhood looking for little Marvey, who she had gotten to know while the owner was in our care. Lo and behold! Our nurse found Marvey two blocks away, got out of her car, put Marvey in it and drove her back home! Our patient was so happy! The pictures tell the story!

TRUSTEE PROFILES

VNA Philadelphia is delighted to welcome three new members of the Board of Trustees

Jonathan D. Kennedy, BA, JD

Jon Kennedy was born in Roxborough and has made East Falls his home for the past 12 years. A Temple University Fox School of Business degree in Business Administration paired with a JD degree from the Beasley School of Law at Temple, prepared Jon to practice law in New York City for 10 years before returning home to Philadelphia where he decided to change careers. Kennedy is now a consultant running his own business catering to the hospitality and restaurant industry. Jon’s skills with event planning as well as his dedication to the community we serve will be of particular value to the Board subcommittee Jon has agreed to join, the Development Committee.

Melissa O’Connor, PhD, MBA, RN

Melissa O’Connor is a Villanova University College of Nursing Associate Professor of Nursing and Claire M. Fagin Fellow (2014-2016), National Hartford Centers of Gerontological Nursing Excellence, John A. Hartford Foundation, Eugenie and Joseph Doyle Research Fellow (2013-2014), Center for Home Care Policy & Research, Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

Valerie Weber, MD, MS, FACP

Valerie Weber, MD, MS, FACP, is the Deborah J. Tuttle, MD and John P. Piper, MD Vice Dean for Education Affairs at Drexel University College of Medicine. Her leadership of the Office of Educational Affairs includes ensuring curricular and educational excellence, and working collaboratively with other departments at Drexel to create innovations in medical education for current medical student and in the future. Dr. Weber came to Drexel in 2014 from The Commonwealth Medical College.

A Note to Our Donors: You Make a Difference!

So much of everything we do to take care of people is because of your generosity. We are grateful beyond words for our donors.

Every day, we receive your gifts in the mail or on line at our website www.vnaphilly.org. Many of your donations include a note about why you were moved to give a gift. In memory of a friend or a family member; in honor of a nurse or other care provider who took such good care of you or a loved one; your words are moving and your actions are life changing.

You helped buy new flooring in our hospice unit, you helped purchase the new bags for our clinicians, you enabled us to provide music, massage, and pet therapy to our patients. Your investment in our Agency is making a difference in our community and in people’s lives.

Why do we need your financial help? Contrary to what some people think, we aren’t funded by the City of Philadelphia, insurance doesn’t always pay all of our costs, and we treat patients who aren’t able to pay us. We’re a charity. And you make an impact.
The work we do at VNA Philadelphia is very serious. Everyone of us has a role to play in the care of our patients and their families. We’re dedicated to providing patient satisfaction and service standards of excellence every day.

Occasionally, the team gets to have a little fun. On Halloween, we enjoyed a pot-luck lunch along with contests including best costume, best-decorated pumpkin and best food visual presentation.

**Best Costume**

Olivia Geiger, one of our Certified Therapy Dogs pictured with Chaplain Donna Geiger, won best costume as a Panda Bear.

Linda McIver, SVP Hospice, won Best Decorated Pumpkin for her creation of Cinderella’s coach.

Joe Maurone, Administrative Assistant, Orders Tracking.

Mariah Hennigan, Intake Referral Specialist.

LeAnne Hall-Stowe, Clinical Recruiter.

*(Pictured left to right)*

Karissa Smith, Administrative Assistant, Face to Face, with Osiris Naverio, Lakita Sutton and Roberta Ross-Whipple, Administrative Assistants for Orders Tracking.

Rob Kidd, Facilities Manager (left) and Dominique Scott, (right) Administrative Assistant, Volunteer Services.

Dawn Michelizzi, SVP, Chief Financial Officer.

Joanna Vanore, (left) Social Worker and Chaplain Laura Barry (right).

Jane Bradley, Administrative Assistant, Marketing.

Terry Scott, Hospice Volunteer Manager with Odie, in training to be one of our Certified Therapy Dogs, dressed as a super hero.

**Best Food Visual Presentation**

Mary Ellen Golden, Patient Care Manager, (pictured right) won Best Food Visual Presentation for her home-made Brain Cake.

Osiris Naverio, Administrative Assistant (left) Orders Tracking and Gary Boswell, IT Specialist (right).

Zac Adams, Hospice Bereavement Coordinator with daughter Eleanor.

Jane Bradley, Administrative Assistant, Marketing.

Terry Scott, Hospice Volunteer Manager with Odie, in training to be one of our Certified Therapy Dogs, dressed as a super hero.
Contact Us

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215-473-7600
215-473-0772

Or visit us on the web at www.vnaphilly.org.

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Walter W. Borginis, III, President and CEO/Karen Zielinski, Editor

VNA Philadelphia Vital Signs…
Our Quarterly Newsletter

VNA Philadelphia. The right care. Right now.

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