INSIDE this ISSUE

Reiki - A Healing Therapy
Improving Quality of Life Through Palliative Care
What Makes an Exceptional Home Health Aide?
Dear Friends,

The Affordable Care Act, now confirmed as law, brings with it the expectation of a more universal and equitable health care system. For this to become a reality, continued health care reform is necessary. The manner in which care is provided, and, just as importantly, how it is financed, must be critically reviewed.

Over the past several years, we have seen the traditional fee-for-service model begin to give way and start to be replaced with a managed care approach. The shift is meant to control costs while improving clinical outcomes – in short, to give patients what they are paying for.

We are seeing the emergence of new models for managing health care problems, the creation of health insurance exchanges that should improve access to benefits for the uninsured and underinsured, and new advances in technology that will improve monitoring and management of complex patient care needs. Understanding that 5% of the population is responsible for nearly half of our country’s medical spending, it makes sense to closely evaluate this population, which includes many individuals with chronic disease. These patients, many of whom are frequently readmitted to the hospital, require additional attention, education, and support to manage their health.

In an effort to address this need, VNA recently launched a new initiative, the Transition Coach Program, which has now been implemented in three local hospitals. VNA Transition Coaches begin to work with patients while they are still hospitalized and continue to support them for 30 days after they are discharged. The program teaches patients how to effectively self-manage their care, how to gain a better understanding of what symptoms may indicate a problem, and outlines what interventions are necessary to prevent an acute episode.

In the midst of this tremendous shift in our nation’s health care system, VNA will continue to be at the forefront of launching innovative and creative solutions for managing patient care and for ensuring that our patients’ needs remain at the center of everything we do. Although we find ourselves with more answers than questions, effective reform of our health care system is a process that must take its course. Most would agree that the intent of the changes is positive and noble, but as is so often the case, the devil remains in the details. It is not easy to forge a new path into the unknown, but one hopes that ultimately, the result will be the provision of health care for all Americans.

My best wishes for a happy, healthy spring!

Michele A. Quirolo
President & CEO

Thank you to the following grantors for their support of our programs.

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Healing Arts                                        
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VNA of Hudson Valley                                
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Improving Quality of Life Through Palliative Care

VNA of Hudson Valley’s Palliative Care Program is focused on improving the quality of life of individuals with serious illnesses who are often undergoing curative and aggressive treatment. The Program was designed for patients who require more than short-term homecare, yet who may not be ready for hospice services. Palliative care can be considered at any point during an illness, from the time of diagnosis through the advanced stages of an illness.

Once thought to be only for cancer patients, palliative care programs now provide support for people dealing with a wide variety of illnesses. Along with curative therapies meant to prolong life, palliative care may also be offered. Many patients can benefit from palliative care, including any adult or child with a chronic or serious illness who is experiencing pain or other symptoms, individuals whose quality of life is being impacted by the burden of illness or the treatment, a person living with advanced or serious illnesses such as cancer, neurological diseases, ALS or dementia or an individual who has frequent re-hospitalizations or emergency room visits.

Pain, nausea, fatigue, anxiety, shortness of breath and other symptoms of a serious or chronic illness can significantly interfere with quality of life. VNA’s palliative care nurses specialize in comprehensive symptom management and focus on physical, emotional, spiritual and practical concerns while supporting the patient and family. The goal of palliative care is to help patients return to living life to the fullest with optimal comfort, and VNA's approach is to create an individualized and fine-tuned plan of care.

“People think that palliative care is only for physical pain, but it’s much more than that,” says VNA’s Tara Orsetti, RN. “We need to address both the physical and emotional symptoms of our patients.”

“It’s all about education,” she continued. “It’s important to educate our patients about their diseases and the services available to them. This will empower them to take action to stay in their homes and receive care.”

In June 2012, Tara assumed the position of VNA of Hudson Valley’s palliative care nurse for Putnam County. Prior to that, Tara worked for Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam for five years.

Palliative care offers comfort for the patient’s family as well as for the patient. The program provides a line of support and open communication to caregivers. “I talk to the family about their fears and concerns, and what they can expect from the program,” Tara said. “Giving them a plan puts their minds at ease and gives them more confidence in caring for a loved one at home.”

VNA of Hudson Valley’s Palliative Care Program uses a multidisciplinary approach to patient care. The team, led by experienced palliative care nurses, has access to all of the services offered by the VNA family of organizations. The Medical Director of VNA and Hospice Care is readily available for consultations. Additional resources and services are provided as needed, including chaplains, social workers, mental health nurses, Telehealth and healing arts practitioners (massage, Reiki, music and art therapy). This multidisciplinary approach allows the palliative care team to address the physical, emotional, spiritual, and social concerns that often accompany advanced illnesses.

“I want to give every patient the very best of our services,” said Linda Fraser, RN, BS, CHPN, a palliative care nurse for VNA of Hudson Valley.

(Continued on page 2)
Improving Quality of Life Through Palliative Care

“I try to utilize the many resources of palliative care to improve the quality of life. I’ll do whatever it takes – I’ll advocate on behalf of patients who otherwise might not have access to this high quality of care.”

The VNA Palliative Care Program has seen significant growth since it began in 2010. In the program’s first year, 66 patients were served with 205 visits. By 2012, the program more than doubled – last year, VNA nurses cared for 160 patients and provided more than 638 visits. For more information about the Palliative Care Program, please call (914) 666-7616.

VNAHV Partners with NWGC for Educational Program

The staff of VNA of Hudson Valley is dedicated to playing an active role in the health care needs of the community we serve. Often, staff members are selected to serve on boards and on committees of organizations that share a mission with VNA. One such organization, the Northern Westchester Geriatric Committee (NWGC) focuses on sharing information about and resources related to the comprehensive continuum of care available to our local geriatric population.

The committee brings together more than 40 different health professionals and organizations, including assisted living facilities, home care and licensed agencies, senior case managers, financial and long-term care insurance specialists, eldercare lawyers, and relocation specialists for seniors. Cornelia Schimert, RN, VNA’s Director of Community Relations, serves as President of the NWGC, and Ellen Wright, LMSW, VNA’s Director of Social Work and Mental Health Home Care, serves on NWGC’s Executive Board.

One of the goals of the committee is to provide educational programs and networking opportunities for its members and for the community. On February 7, 2013, the NWGC invited staff from Northern Westchester Hospital to discuss important changes in coverage guidelines by Medicare and other insurance providers. The program, called “Observation Status in the Emergency Department: The Who, What, When, How and Why” was presented by Dr. Eugene Spagnuolo, Emergency Room Physician, Cheryl Ann Fella, RN, Emergency Department Case Manager and Katie Griffin, RN, Director of Regulatory Affairs and Case Management. The panel of presenters reviewed recent changes to Medicare coverage guidelines in hospitals and the impact that these changes will have on all patients, especially the elderly.

The key impact of this particular change will be to patients who seek care in the Emergency Department but who cannot be treated there and released. These patients may be placed on “observation status,” and remain in the hospital for one to two days, yet will not be admitted. During this time, they will receive close medical evaluation and diagnostic testing to determine if they need further treatment, inpatient admission or if they can be released. While these changes may be confusing to the general public, Dr. Spagnuolo stressed that the outcome would be better and faster care and higher patient satisfaction rates.

As a result of the presentation, participants gained a better understanding of this new level of care and are now more prepared to explain the changes to the clients, patients and the families with whom they work.

For more information about the Northern Westchester Geriatric Committee, please visit nwgeriatriccommittee.org or call Cornelia Schimert at (914) 666-7616.
VNA to Hold 19th Annual Awards Presentation

Get ready for a night at the races! On Friday, May 3, 2013, Visiting Nurse Association of Hudson Valley will host its 19th Annual Awards Presentation at Empire City at Yonkers Raceway. During the cocktail hour, guests will enjoy the thrill of watching live harness racing. The VNA Awards Event offers a fun-filled evening with great food, music, themed décor and a silent auction that boasts something for everyone - from jewelry and spa treatments to ski trips, sports memorabilia and family activities.

Janine Rose, News Director and Anchor for News 12 Westchester and longtime friend and supporter of VNAHV, will once again host the event and present awards to a slate of very deserving honorees.

Tickets, journal ads and sponsorships are available and can be purchased by calling (914) 666-7616, ext 1210 or emailing amelnyk@vnahv.org.
VNA Home Health Services Completes First Training Course of 2013

From February 25 to March 14, VNA Home Health Services conducted the first of this year’s four scheduled Home Health Aide training courses. This was the 19th training session since the program began in 2008. According to Charlotte Smith, Vice President of VNA’s Home Health Services, this year’s class was the most culturally diverse yet — languages spoken included Chinese, Japanese, Spanish and Portuguese.

“More diversity means a broader patient reach and a greater ability to continue our mission of serving everyone who needs our help,” said Ms. Smith. The VNA family of organizations employs certified home health aides for private duty care, home health care and hospice care.

Admission requirements for the program are stringent. To be accepted, applicants must pass an entrance exam, complete a physical, successfully complete a drug screen and agree to be fingerprinted.

VNA’s training program is conducted entirely in house. Seven different instructors, including a physical therapist, a social worker, a maternal health specialist, a hospice nurse and other staff nurses teach students in a classroom setting. The intense three-week program includes blocks of study on the basics of home health care, anatomy, personal care, medication management, rehabilitation, disease management, psychosocial issues and an introduction to payment options, including private insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. The course culminates in a half-day written examination. Trainees who pass the examination and complete the clinical requirement may become employed on a probationary basis for three months.

Ms. Smith underscored the advantages of VNA’s unique in-house training capability: “By keeping the program here, we are able to get to know our aides very well, to familiarize ourselves not only with their skill set, but also with their character and personality. When it comes time to match them for a position, we can put the best aide for that patient into the home.” The ability to match on the basis of personality is important and results in greater patient and employee satisfaction rates. As a result, VNA has among the highest retention rates for its home health aides.

VNA’s training and employment placement program is free of charge and is fully funded with private donations from individuals and foundations. To find out more about how you can support this community initiative, please contact Adrianna Melnyk at (914) 666-7616, ext. 1210 or amelnyk@vnahv.org.
What Makes an Exceptional Home Health Aide?

It has been said that home is where the heart is, that *home* is the nicest word there is and that there is no place like it. No wonder then that our loved ones who are no longer able to take care of themselves or who need help while recovering from an illness or injury prefer to remain at home. Often, the only way this is possible is with the support of home health aides, who can provide a broad spectrum of services, including assistance with medication, meal preparation, housekeeping, shopping and errands, laundry, personal care and companionship.

Certified aides, such as those provided by VNA Home Health Services, are carefully evaluated before being hired. They must have a clean track record that can withstand rigorous background checks on the state and federal level. But beyond that, there are “softer” traits that are needed and that should be evaluated when seeking an aide for yourself or for your loved one.

Exceptional home health aides embody three characteristics: compassion, professionalism and excellent communication skills, of which the most important is the ability to listen. This skill is critical in determining the best approaches to take with a patient. Through careful listening an aide can determine how much coaching a patient desires, how self-directed the patient would like to be and how much regular interaction the patient would like to have. Some patients are private and prefer to keep to themselves, while others would like more involvement, conversation and companionship. “Listening to and then acting on what the patient wants and needs makes them feel valued and respected, and this is a key aspect of building trust between the aide and the patient,” says Ms. Smith.

VNA closely assesses these characteristics during the home health aide training program. And, while they are not traits that can be taught, it quickly becomes obvious to both the student and to instructors either before or during the training when they are lacking them. “To be an effective home health aide requires loving what you do and having compassion for your patients – it is not an easy job and only those who are truly dedicated will be successful,” says Ms. Smith.

Fostering Resilience and Hope in Children after Loss and Trauma

The recent tragedy that took place in Newtown, CT has brought a great deal of attention to the needs of grieving children. When children experience traumatic loss, clergy and lay leaders in the local community become emotional and spiritual “first responders” and often minister to children and families over an extended period of time. While some leaders have had education and training in this area, many have not. Grief work with children can evoke strong personal reactions that need to be understood and addressed.

In April, Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam will host a panel discussion for clergy and lay leaders on the topic of traumatic grief. A breakfast presentation featuring Nancy Boyd Webb, DSW LICSW RPT-S and a panel of experts will examine the typical responses of children to death at various developmental stages and will teach the skills necessary for ministering and supporting children and families through a healthy grieving process.

Dr. Webb is a clinical social worker and former distinguished university professor at Fordham University’s Graduate School of Social Work.

(Continued on page 6)
Fostering Resilience and Hope in Children after Loss and Trauma

She has published several books based on her extensive experience as a child and family therapist, including *Play Therapy with Children in Crisis: Individual, Group and Family Treatment* and *Helping Bereaved Children: A Handbook for Practitioners.*

As children enter middle school (10 – 13 years old), they begin to understand that death is irreversible and happens to everyone. They are curious about death’s biological features and worry about the future and the consequences of what death will mean for themselves and their family. Teenagers typically have an adult perception and understanding of death, yet generally feel that death can not touch them. They are particularly vulnerable because of their developing concept of self and tendency to question life’s meaning. Teenagers will often look to their peers or adults outside of the family to share their feelings and worries.

Even though children differ in their understanding of death, they all need to be reminded that even though they have lost a loved one, there will always be loving family members and friends to care for them. The loss of a significant and meaningful relationship can impact a child’s sense of identity, feelings of trust and safety and his or her values and belief systems.

If a child is having a difficult time coping with grief, seeking professional help is recommended. Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam’s Caring Circle is one such forum, and provides a supportive and welcoming community to help children deal with their feelings.

This will be the third annual Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam clergy breakfast. Past events have attracted more than 100 participants, including clergy leaders, lay leaders, clerical leaders, hospital chaplains and a physician chairperson of a hospital ethics committee. In response to positive feedback from participants, Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam has decided to offer this program annually. It is thanks to generous support from the Hospice Education Institute and other funders that these events can continue.

Bereavement counselors at Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam are always available to provide support. For more information about this event and our bereavement programs, please call (914) 666-4228.
The goal of Hospice Care is to provide the highest level of comfort under the most challenging of circumstances. Realizing that this comfort can come from many sources, Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam offers a range of Healing Art therapies, including Reiki, an ancient technique of light touch or no-touch therapy that is used for stress reduction and relaxation and can promote healing. A very simple yet powerful technique, Reiki is non-invasive and can provide support for the mind, body and spirit.

The practice encourages a state of deep relaxation and a general feeling of well-being through connection to what is believed to be a “universal life force” and works on the premise that all living things have an energy field that must be balanced in order to maintain mental, physical and spiritual health. When this energy field becomes unbalanced, blocked or weakened, illness or stress can occur. Reiki practitioners identify negatively-affected parts of an individual’s energy field and work to charge them with positive energy. The practice of Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, and allows the “life force” to flow in a healthy and natural way.

Gail Delaney, Reiki practitioner for Hospice Care says that, “for some, the concept of Reiki is difficult to understand. However, whether one understands it or not, the benefits for those that have experienced or witnessed it are undeniable.”

After years of exploring various healing techniques, Gail followed what she says was an “inner calling to be of service” and became a Reiki Master in 2000. She has worked with clients with a variety of issues including cancer, cardiac disease, multiple sclerosis, Graves Disease, Crohn’s Disease, depression and stress. In 2004, she began volunteering with Hospice Care in Westchester & Putnam and a year later, joined the Healing Arts Program.

Since joining Hospice Care, Gail has provided care to the terminally ill and aged who are in the final stages of their illnesses. In her first session with a patient, Gail meets with the patient and family to assess the person’s condition, taking into account mind, body, and spirit. Gail begins her session by placing one hand on the back of the neck and the other on the shoulder to acclimate the person to her touch. Over the years, Gail has developed her own style, and depending on the patient’s condition and needs, adapts the session accordingly.

According to patients and family members, the effects of Reiki are immediate. Patients become visibly calmer and signs of agitation, such as shaking hands, labored breathing and tremors, cease. In particular, patients who suffer from chronic pain often feel a reduction in the intensity of their pain.

When Gail began working with Hospice Care, she quickly recognized that Reiki not only provided comfort, but also a sense of peace and calm. Over time, it became apparent that these effects were especially beneficial to those in the process of dying.

“Working with Hospice Care in this capacity is my passion, and I’m so glad that the Healing Arts Program has embraced Reiki, as it is a gentle and beautiful way to honor all those who are going through the dying process – and isn’t that what Hospice is all about?” says Gail.

Reiki is compatible with traditional medicine and is often used as a complementary treatment. The healing is not always about returning the patient to perfect physical health, but rather about providing pain management, stress relief and emotional healing. For more information about Reiki and the Healing Arts Program, please call (914) 666-4228.

Gail Delaney treats a patient during a Reiki session.
We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”
–Winston Churchill

You can build a lasting legacy with a planned gift to VNA of Hudson Valley. Your charitable bequest can help to ensure that those who most need our help – the underinsured and uninsured, the frail and elderly, children and families who have lost a loved one – continue to receive it. It’s as easy as naming VNA of Hudson Valley as a beneficiary of your will, retirement plan or life insurance policy.

**Benefits of a bequest include:**
- Establishing a lasting legacy;
- Enabling you to make a greater contribution than would have been possible during your lifetime;
- Decreasing the tax burden on your estate.

But most of all, a bequest provides the satisfaction of knowing that your support will enable VNA of Hudson Valley to meet the health care needs of our community for generations to come.

Your gift qualifies you for membership in the

*Katherine Marquand Planned Giving Society*

For more information about establishing a trust, setting up a charitable gift annuity or creating a gift through your estate, please contact Adrianna Melnyk at: (914) 666-7616, ext. 1210 or amelnyk@vnahv.org.
Foundation Welcomes New Board Members

In the fall of 2012, VNA & Hospice Care Foundation of Hudson Valley announced the appointment of three new board members – Giulio Cefaloni of Mahopac, Kerry Filippone of Katonah and Mary Beth Morrissey of White Plains.

Giulio Cefaloni, Senior Assistant Director of Technology at Fordham University, brings to the Board a strong background in community service and corporate experience. He is a trustee of the Mahopac Italian American Club, Chairman of The Annual Putnam County Columbus Day Festivities, past trustee/President/VP of the Mahopac Central School District, and a member of The Town of Carmel Ethics Board and The Mahopac Central School District Health Advisory Council. Cefaloni, who also serves on the VNAHV Board says, “It is a privilege to have the opportunity to serve on this board. My parents received care from the VNA and Hospice Care and I truly appreciate the value of the excellent programs offered by this family of organizations.”

Kerry Filippone, a realtor with Coldwell Banker in Bedford, has been actively involved with the Caring Circle Benefit for many years. For the last three years, along with her husband Tom, she has served as the Chairperson of the event. Her leadership has helped to increase support for the Caring Circle Program and to raise its visibility and broaden its reach to new audiences.

Mary Beth Quaranta Morrissey, J.D., Ph.D, is a local and regional advocate for patient rights, palliative care and healthcare ethics. A past recipient of VNA’s Ellen Wood Health Care Award, Morrissey has been recognized by numerous local and state organizations and institutions, including Westchester County Public Private Partnership, Department of Senior Programs and Fordham Graduate School of Social Service. In October 2012, she received the Mental Health Association of Westchester’s On the Move award. Morrissey’s past service to the VNA includes work on the ethics committee and on the professional advisory panel.

Foundation Chairman Peter Burchell comments, “We are very pleased to have the talents and dedication of these distinguished individuals. Their expertise, ideas and enthusiasm will help us continue moving forward in our mission of raising awareness and support for the benefit of the VNA family of organizations and for the health care needs of residents of Westchester and Putnam Counties.”

Left to right: Giulio Cefaloni, Mary Beth Quaranta Morrissey and Kerry Filippone.

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☐ I have enclosed my employer’s matching gift form

Contributions to The Caring Tree support programs funded by the VNA & Hospice Care Foundation of Hudson Valley. Your support benefits the largest family of not-for-profit organizations providing home health care services, directly reaching those in need in our community. Please help us perpetuate the tradition of excellence in home health care services we pride ourselves on.