Volunteer finds nothing more rewarding than supporting hospice

The first patient Peg Nastasia ever visited as a hospice volunteer taught her something that has stayed with her for nearly a decade.

The patient, Mary, was an older woman who lived alone and was dealing with cancer. Mary’s biggest fear was how people would react to her appearance. She had been left disfigured after her jawbone was removed due to the cancer and not replaced. Peg began visiting to help Mary with chores, and the two would find themselves talking over a cup of tea.

“She was the most spirited person I ever met,” remembered Peg. “She taught me how valuable it was to just sit and spend time with someone.”

Peg has been part of many families’ lives in Greater Boston and the North Shore, visiting once or twice a week for as long as she’s needed. Hospice volunteers provide companionship and support, respite for family caregivers, and much more.

“As a volunteer, you’re not only helping the patient. You’re helping the family too. I often go to see a patient and he or she is sleeping. The caregiver is exhausted and just needs someone to listen to them, someone who understands what they are going through,” Peg added. Her own parents had received hospice care, and the experiences motivated her to become a volunteer in her retirement.

In addition to volunteers, the hospice team also includes physicians, nurses, social workers, hospice aides, chaplains, and therapists. The team provides physical, emotional, practical, and spiritual support to help patients and families live as fully as possible. Care is provided in patients’ homes, assisted living and other facilities, and VNA Hospice & Palliative Care’s three hospice residences.

Peg has seen the difference the hospice team makes. She visited Connie, a 93-year-old, and her brother, John, age 95, for nearly two years. John had been caring for his sister on his own until Connie began receiving end-of-life care from VNA Hospice & Palliative Care.

Volunteer finds nothing more rewarding... continued on p. 2
Donors choose how to make an impact

*Because of the generosity of our donors, we’re here for the community 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

Donations help us care for patients in need, provide end-of-life care in patients’ homes and at our hospice residences, develop new health care programs, provide advanced training to staff, purchase medical equipment, and much more.

Donors may ask that their gift be used for the greatest need or direct their support to:

- VNA Care Network
- VNA of Boston
- VNA Hospice & Palliative Care
- Elizabeth Evarts de Rham Hospice Home, Cambridge
- Rose Monahan Hospice Home, Worcester
- Stanley R. Tippett Hospice Home, Needham

Our Fund Development staff is available to provide personalized assistance. Please contact us at 888-663-3688, ext. 1365 or giving@vnacare.org. You can also learn more ways to support home health and hospice care, including memorial donations, and make a gift at www.vnacare.org/donors.

VNA Care President and CEO Mary Ann O’Connor to retire

Mary Ann O’Connor, president and CEO of VNA Care, announced her plan to retire in January after a career of more than 40 years in home health and hospice care.

“I have so enjoyed the important work we have done together,” said Mary Ann. “We have been diligent in our quest to enhance the capability of home care and hospice for our patients and families, our community, and our partners in the health care field, which has put us on the forefront as innovators in Massachusetts.”

Since joining VNA Care in 2012, Mary Ann has led the nonprofit in establishing new services and partnerships to help people proactively manage health concerns and avoid repeated trips to the hospital. Other new services, like the Behavioral Health Program, remove barriers to important services for homebound individuals or, in the case of the Palliative Care Program, fill gaps in health care services across Eastern and Central Massachusetts.

Mary Ann’s work to ensure the availability of nonprofit home health and hospice care in the state also led to a partnership with Atrius Health, a nonprofit physician organization, and the formation of VNA Care by bringing together VNA Care Network, VNA of Boston, and VNA Hospice & Palliative Care.

Diane Leclair, chair of VNA Care’s board of directors, shared, “While we wish Mary Ann good health and happiness in the next chapter of her life, we will certainly miss her visionary leadership, passion, and dedication to our mission.”

VNA Care is in the final stages of the search for Mary Ann’s successor. Watch an upcoming issue of *Caring Matters* to meet our new president and CEO.

To learn more about Mary Ann’s extensive contributions to home health and hospice care, visit the news section of www.vnacare.org.

VOLUNTEER FINDS NOTHING MORE REWARDING …Continued from front cover

“Their quality of life improved dramatically. John had so much support,” said Peg.

Connie loved to reminisce, so Peg spent much of her visits listening to stories about growing up in an Italian neighborhood and the wonderful aromas of everyone cooking Sunday dinner. They’d look through Connie’s photo albums from the time she married while living abroad in Italy. “Connie liked to say that the marriage didn’t last, but the pictures are wonderful,” remembered Peg.

Peg said her time with patients is a privilege. She added, “If you can help someone and their loved ones at the end of life, there’s nothing more rewarding or more important.”

Your Caring Matters

For more information about becoming a hospice volunteer, please visit www.vnacare.org/volunteers or call 781-569-2811. To make a donation in support of hospice, please use the enclosed donation envelope or visit our website, www.vnacare.org/donors.
Supporters gather to celebrate Worcester anniversaries, build future of home health and hospice care

This year brought two important milestones for VNA Care, 125 years as Worcester’s Visiting Nurses and 20 years of the Rose Monahan Hospice Home, the first hospice residence in Central Massachusetts. Donors, current and retired staff, volunteers and other friends of VNA Care toasted the occasion during a special reception at the Beechwood Hotel, Worcester.

The event was part of a yearlong campaign, “Honoring Our Past, Investing In Our Future,” to address immediate needs that will make an impact on the health and wellness of Worcester area residents today and into the future. Through the generosity of the following donors, the campaign has raised more than $460,000.

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Worcester Anniversary Committee Co-chairs Robin Spaulding (left) and Lenny Monahan (right) were honored for many years of volunteerism and support of VNA Care and the Rose Monahan Hospice Home. They are pictured with Jane Woodbury, vice president of fund development, (second from left) and Diane Leclaire, chair of the VNA Care board of directors (third from left).
More than 300 walkers and runners Step Out for Hospice

The Woburn Friends of VNA Hospice & Palliative Care, Shamrock Running Club, and Irish American Club of Woburn brought the community together for the 20th annual Step Out for Hospice around Horn Pond, Woburn. The walk, road race, and kids’ fun run raised more than $60,000 for hospice care. Attendees enjoyed live music by Site 39, and had the chance to win over 100 raffle and auction prizes.

Our sincere appreciation to the many businesses, service clubs, and individuals who sponsored Step Out for Hospice, including:

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Team Lanie Allen
Long before attorney James “Jim” Cosgrove joined VNA Care’s board of directors 25 years ago, he experienced the nonprofit’s “amazing care” of his grandmother, mother, and father.

Jim remains committed to VNA Care, as a volunteer and donor, to this day “based on both personal experiences of VNA Care’s continuing, life-saving in some instances, care of my family members, friends, and clients.”

He added that VNA Care “continues to provide the best, cutting-edge, most diverse and loving care of our patients and, as a nonprofit, charitable organization, untold care and services to those of limited means in their time of greatest need.”

Jim has many stories about people in his life who were helped during times of illness or injury by VNA Care. He remembered two of his aunts were “saved so much pain in their final years” through the Palliative Care Program. Just over a year ago, one of his aunts, at age 94, passed away in the homelike surroundings of the Rose Monahan Hospice Home after her older sister sang “You made me love you” to her.

He said, “The residence exemplifies VNA Care and, if one cannot be in their own home, that is absolutely the best, most peaceful and caring place to be. I will be eternally grateful for it, regretting only that it came a few years too late for my own Mom.”

Supporting nonprofit health care through gifts of stock

Donations enable VNA Care to respond to the health care needs of the community, including developing new services like the Palliative Care Program, maintaining three hospice residences for the terminally ill, providing advanced education opportunities to clinicians, investing in technology and medical equipment, and other initiatives that support exceptional care for patients and their loved ones.
Needham area volunteers host most successful benefit to date

More Cool Hot Jazz, the Needham Area Community Cabinet’s fourth annual benefit, raised more than $50,000 in essential funding for VNA Care Network, VNA Hospice & Palliative Care, and the Stanley R. Tippett Hospice Home in Needham. Guests also gave generously for the purchase of two beds for the Tippett Home during the Cabinet’s first “Fund the Mission,” an auction-style giving opportunity during the event led by board member Jack Cogswell.

We are grateful for the philanthropic support of the following corporate and individual sponsors of More Cool Hot Jazz:

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Elizabeth Kershaw was able to bypass a stay at a rehabilitation facility thanks to the Joint Replacement Program.

Patient credits speedy recovery from hip replacement to VNA Care’s home health team

Elizabeth Kershaw’s surgeon got right to the point. An MRI showed arthritis and significant deterioration of her right hip. She’d need a hip replacement to walk without pain.

“I wanted to get better before I even had the surgery. I didn’t want to keep sitting in a chair,” said Elizabeth.

The operation went smoothly. After two nights in the hospital, Elizabeth returned home with the support of her family and VNA Care’s Total Joint Replacement Program, provided by VNA Care Network and VNA of Boston.

Elsie Camry, RN, made sure Elizabeth’s incision was healing properly, monitored her vital signs, and checked medications. Maureen Bonta, occupational therapist, taught Elizabeth how to move safely during recovery and handle daily activities like showering. Anastasia Panagopoulos, registered physical therapist, and Diane Sinanian, physical therapy assistant, focused on exercises to restore joint motion and strength.

During Elizabeth’s first two weeks with VNA Care’s Total Joint Replacement Program, she used a walker to get around her home. When she felt like she’d never be able to return to the outdoor walks that she loves, the home health care team was there to boost her spirits and provide reassurance.

“They’d say, ‘You are way ahead of the curve. ...You just have to keep at it and be diligent,’” remembered Elizabeth.

She followed their advice, exercising and walking to improve her mobility. In just three weeks after surgery, Elizabeth was able to swap her walker for a cane and continue her rehabilitation at an outpatient facility. She credits VNA Care’s staff with her speedy recovery.

“I can’t tell you how great they were to me and how confident I felt in their care. They all were so very knowledgeable about any questions I had, and always made me feel like I was their only patient that day,” shared Elizabeth.

Mayors recognize VNA Care’s contributions to the community

The City of Worcester marked VNA Care Day this fall thanks to a proclamation issued by Mayor Joseph M. Petty. The special day was in honor of our 125th anniversary as Worcester’s Visiting Nurses and the 20th anniversary of the Rose Monahan Hospice Home. Karen Webber, development officer, accepted the proclamation.

Mayor Scott Galvin declared November as National Hospice & Palliative Care Month in the City of Woburn. Mayor Galvin presented the proclamation to members of the Woburn Friends of VNA Hospice & Palliative Care, a group of volunteers that has raised awareness of and charitable support for hospice care for 25 years.

Pictured from left are Diane Sawyer, Richard Haggerty, Carol Flaherty, Joseph McDonough, Mayor Scott Galvin, Brian Kelley, Carole Torrice, Connie McGilvray, Barbara McElhiney, and Robert Brown.
VNA Hospice & Palliative Care outperformed national averages in the Center for Medicare and Medicaid’s Hospice Compare.

The new, online tool gives people the opportunity to review how Medicare-certified hospices throughout the country perform on seven indicators of quality care covering patient preferences, managing pain, and treating symptoms.

“Patients and families are at the center of everything we do. Our Hospice Compare scores reflect the compassionate and highly skilled care we strive to provide to each and every person we serve,” said Daiva Braunfelds, vice president of hospice and advanced illness management.

Among the quality indicators on Hospice Compare is a measure of “patients who got a timely and thorough pain assessment when pain was identified as a problem.” VNA Hospice & Palliative Care’s average was 97.7% compared to the national average of 77.7%. VNA Hospice & Palliative Care also surpassed national averages in all other categories including “timely treatment for shortness of breath” and “asking about patients’ or caregivers’ beliefs and values at the beginning of care.”

VNA Hospice & Palliative Care’s quality improvement staff continuously tracks important patient care measurements and identifies trends. The information enables the organization to quickly adapt to changing needs, provide new educational opportunities to clinicians, and examine resources that support exceptional care.

“You don’t get second chances with hospice, so we want to get it right from the beginning. With these scores, people can feel assured that we’re providing great care,” said Jeanne Ryan, director of quality, education, and compliance for VNA Hospice & Palliative Care.