No slowing down for 84-year-old with VNA Care’s nurses in his corner

Richard “Dick” Vaughan has relied on VNA Care during some “very tough stretches” over the past three years. When the pandemic hit Massachusetts, he didn’t hesitate to welcome VNA Care’s clinicians into his home.

“I’m a prime candidate for COVID-19. I’m going to be 85 in 20 some odd days. I have emphysema, asthma all my life, and umpteen doctors taking care of me. They (VNA Care’s clinicians) can come here any time they want, any day they want. They wear their masks and put on their gloves. ...They are the safest people,” said Dick. “They could save your life. One of them did save my life.”

The nurse who quite possibly saved his life was Heather Robinson, LPN. She was part of the home health care team caring for Dick after surgery earlier this year. During what they both expected to be a routine visit in February, Heather made the necessary decision to send Dick to the emergency room. He had a fever and his knee was swollen and bright red, indicators of a very serious condition.

Dick underwent surgery again. Following his hospital stay and some time at a skilled nursing facility, he was able to return home with the support of VNA Care just as the pandemic was shutting down much of the state.

One of VNA Care’s specialized programs is wound care, which employs a team of certified wound, ostomy and continence nurse specialists (CWOCN) who care for patients and serve as resources for other clinicians. Post-surgery, Keri Charpentier, RN, and Carrie Bergman, RN, CWOCN, are focused on getting Dick’s wound to fully heal while he remains in the safety and comfort of his home.

Dick said, “When they’re coming, I get excited because it’s going to be a fun visit. Yes, they are going to check my vital signs. Yes, they are going to check my lungs and listen to my heart. Yes, they’re going to do everything they have to do and then change the bandage. But they also bring with them a little something more than that. They bring with them caring and attention. It’s just a great, great feeling. I can’t say enough good about (the nurses), every single one of them. They are all excellent, excellent people.”

Dick has remained active throughout his health challenges. After a 66-year career in radio as an on-air personality, station manager, and owner, he now serves as general manager of TVCharlton, host of the cable station’s Conversations with Dick Vaughan, and member of the Charlton Board of Assessors.

He remembered one of his doctors advising him to “just keep going as far as you can, as long as you can. That’s better than any pill I could give you.”

With the home health care team from VNA Care in his corner, he has no plans to slow down.

Dick said, “To me, it’s the greatest organization I’ve ever dealt with in my life. Plain and simple.”
Flu vaccination more important than ever to lower risk, protect resources

This fall and winter bring the potential for yet another challenge to our health. Flu viruses will be spreading as we continue grappling with the virus that causes COVID-19.

2017-2018 influenza (flu) vaccine prevented 6.2 million flu illnesses, 3.2 million flu-associated medical visits, 91,000 flu-associated hospitalizations, and 5,700 flu-associated deaths.

“These are really significant numbers,” added Pike-Benton. “The flu shot gives you a way to help take control of your health. You can reduce your risk of getting the flu and spreading it to loved ones. If you get the flu, the vaccine reduces the seriousness of your illness. This helps save healthcare resources for people who truly need them, especially if COVID-19 cases spike again while we wait for a vaccine.”

Flu season typically goes from early October to early April. September and October are particularly good times to get the flu vaccine. The CDC recommends that everyone six months of age or older get the vaccine each year unless their doctor recommends otherwise. Contact your doctor about getting the flu vaccine.

Flu and COVID-19 are both contagious respiratory illnesses, and it is possible to have both at the same time. The two also share a range of symptoms from none (also called asymptomatic) to fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath/difficulty breathing, tiredness, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, muscle pain or body aches, and headache. People with COVID-19 may experience a change or loss in taste or smell. Should you experience any flu-like symptoms, it is important to tell your doctor. Tests may be needed to determine if you have flu or COVID-19 and to plan your care.

“Everyone needs to remain diligent as we face both flu and COVID-19. The best advice I can give is to get your flu shot and follow the COVID-19 prevention guidelines that we’ve come to know well,” said Pike-Benton.

For more information about the flu or COVID-19, visit:

- Massachusetts Department of Public Health at www.mass.gov/dph
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov

This information is intended for educational purposes only. For medical advice, please contact your health care provider.
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Your donations make vital home health and hospice care possible.

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- 2,905 patients participated in telemedicine visits
- 520 gifts to the Emergency Response Fund totaling over $151,000
- 500+ internal wellness hotline calls supporting employees
- 9,515 patients received home health, palliative, and hospice care visits
- 1,000 VNA Care frontline nurses and other clinicians stood up to the challenge of COVID-19 to care for patients and the community
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We are grateful for every contribution made to our Emergency Response Fund.

Your support makes our community strong.

For a list of supporters, please visit: www.vnacare.org/donors
Empty nester finds second act as hospice nurse caring for terminally ill

After raising four children, Maureen McCartney found herself with an empty nest and time to take her life in a new direction. She was all set to start law school when her sister sat her down for a pep talk.

She remembered her sister, who holds a doctorate of nursing practice, saying, “What are you doing? You have wanted to be a nurse since you were a little girl.”

Maureen returned to her alma mater, UMass Boston, for a career aptitude test that showed without question that nursing would be the perfect fit. The oldest of four siblings, Maureen already knew she loved taking care of others. She holds a bachelor’s in psychology and worked as a companion to people with Alzheimer’s and dementia when her children were still in school.

After completing her nursing program, she worked in a variety of settings before finding her true calling as a hospice nurse with VNA Hospice & Palliative Care. Maureen is part of a team that includes physicians and nurse practitioners, social workers, chaplains, bereavement counselors, hospice aides, other clinicians, and trained volunteers.

“I love that hospice treats the whole family. You manage your patient’s pain, their anxiety, their fears, their nausea,” said Maureen. “You listen to families, encourage them, and help them give their parent or family member what they really want – to be at home, be loved, be pain-free.”

Maureen has seen the enormous difference the hospice team has made during the pandemic. One of her patients was an elderly man with heart disease whose condition was further complicated when he contracted COVID-19. The hospice team managed his pain and symptoms, and made it possible for him to continue living in his own home. He enjoyed meaningful time with his daughters and grandchildren, who followed COVID-19 precautions during their visits.

The hospice team tailors care to meet each patient’s needs and goals. Maureen remembered the wishes of a father who was dying of cancer. He wanted to stay at home for as long as possible, but didn’t want his children left with the memory of him dying in their home. As his journey neared its end, the team transferred the father to

Empty nester...continued on p. 2

Maureen McCartney, RN
Photo by Verdi Studio.