

# Caring Matters

Fall 2023



Patricia Boyle (second from left) said VNA Care's clinicians "brought sunshine into my house." Among the staff who helped her recover from multiple falls were Joe Twiraga, PTA, Katy Swanson-Turner, LPN, and Karyl Learmonth, COTA.

## Retired nurse heals from physical, emotional trauma with support and encouragement of VNA Care's home health clinicians

It was just before dawn on that life-changing day, as Patricia Boyle returned home following a brief stay in the emergency room while undergoing tests for pain. She started up the first of two steps to her porch when she collapsed and hit her head on the ground. She managed to get up, but fell yet again.

"The first time I fell, I said to myself, 'I'm not going to cry. There's nobody here. You have to help yourself.' The second time I fell within five minutes, I started

crying because I couldn't believe I was on the ground again and couldn't get up," remembered Patricia.

She eventually made it inside and got into bed, but awoke a few hours later on the floor, unable to stand and with no memory of what happened. She pulled her phone from the bed to the floor and called 911.

Patricia was hospitalized for a brain bleed and spent time at a rehabilitation facility before finally

returning home under the careful watch of VNA Care's home health care team, including Katy Swanson-Turner, LPN, Carolyn Gagnon, PT, Joe Twiraga, PTA, Coni Durkin, OT, and Karyl Learmonth, COTA.

"One big, wonderful thing is that they're cheerful, but they're serious about doing their job," said Patricia, who worked as a registered nurse at UMass Memorial Hospital for 30 years

*Retired nurse...continued on page 3*



Dena McDonough (left) and Lisa Spellman, both from MarshMcLennan Agency, a Presenting Sponsor of Celebration of Caring



From left: David Mantha, Melisa Mantha, RN, Michelle Duval, and David Auger, RN, a featured speaker at the celebration



From left: Sue Gauthier, OT, Barbara Devecis, PT, and Lisa Sternstrom, OT



From left: Community Cabinet members and event sponsors Robin Spaulding and Mary Whalen with Aaron Langlois, vice president of hospice and palliative care

# Celebrating the impact of donors and clinicians on the health of our community

Celebration of Caring, the Worcester Community Cabinet's annual benefit, raised nearly \$65,000 for home health, hospice, and the Rose Monahan Hospice Home thanks to the generosity of our sponsors and partners.

Guests at this inspirational evening learned about the impact of charitable support from VNA Care staff. David Auger, RN, nurse case manager, provided a moment of levity, pretending to get a phone call from a patient in the middle of his remarks. He expressed his gratitude to his colleagues who may be called upon at all hours to support their patients. Lindy Hayden-Queeno, volunteer coordinator, shared the important role of our hospice volunteers. She said, "They provide comfort, companionship, and unwavering support, offering a ray of hope in what can sometimes feel like the darkest of times."

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# VNA Care achieves four-star rating in We Honor Veterans

VNA Care is elevating end-of-life care for local veterans by achieving four-star status in We Honor Veterans, a national initiative led by the Department of Veterans Administration and the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Education has been a key component in the process. Staff not only increased their knowledge of veteran-specific needs and circumstances, but also gained a deeper understanding of employing a trauma-informed approach to patient care. Other elements of the program include training veterans to be hospice volunteers so they can build relationships with and support terminally ill veterans, and family surveys to evaluate and continuously improve the quality of care.

Through this initiative, a closer partnership has developed between the Veterans Administration and VNA Care. Case workers from the Veterans Administration are turning to VNA Care for such things as grief support for spouses of veterans, while VNA Care's hospice social workers are better able to navigate and expedite accessing benefits through the Administration. Michelle Rosneck, MSW, LICSW, bereavement and psychosocial services manager, said, "It's helped us save time for people who don't have time."

Andrew Tripp, MDiv, PhD, hospice spiritual counselor/bereavement and psychosocial services coordinator, added, "The Veterans Administration knowing that they can reach out to us matters. Knowing that we are here,

and we are a support for the bereaved, and our hospice house is available to veterans matters. Awareness of each other and what we both have to offer one another matters so we can do right by our country's veterans."

## How to reach us

**Service Information:** 800-521-5539

**Donations and Mailing List:**  
508-658-7700 or [giving@vnacare.org](mailto:giving@vnacare.org)

**Website:** [VNACare.org](http://VNACare.org)

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## *Retired nurse heals from physical, emotional trauma with support of VNA Care...continued from front cover*

before retirement. "They didn't know I was a nurse at first. They didn't know I could tell they were doing a great job."

She took note of their holistic approach to helping her remain independent at home. Katy Swanson-Turner, LPN, not only monitored Patricia's vital signs and checked for pain, but wanted to be sure that Patricia was eating properly and had family to help with groceries and other needs. Coni Durkin, OT, and Karyl Learmonth, COTA, focused on activities of daily living, like ways to safely shower and prepare meals. Carolyn Gagnon, PT, and Joe Twiraga, PTA, helped Patricia build her strength and even moved a heavy coffee table so she had an obstacle-free space for exercising.

For Patricia, the emotional scars from these falls were as serious as the physical toll. They were so traumatic she couldn't think about opening her front door or look at her front steps without being overcome by fear. "I love to go out and do things, and here I was afraid to go out my door," she said. "They didn't just let me sit in my

chair because I was scared. They gave me the support and that push, and said, 'You can do it, Patricia, and it's going to get better!'"

VNA Care's team helped her learn to walk down the stairs using a walker. Patricia said, "I was so scared to put my foot down on that first step. They stood right beside me. Over a period of two or three days, they helped me, and I could do it."

After mastering the stairs, the physical therapists would take her on walks outside. She grew stronger and more confident, and the team decided it was time for Patricia to tackle one last hurdle – driving. They taught her how to get in and out of the car and manage her walker. The VNA Care team gave her the courage to drive to the local post office to pick up her mail. To her family's relief (and dismay!), after one month of visits from VNA Care's home health care team, Patricia is back to one of her favorite activities, shopping.

"I felt so happy to be out again. VNA Care did that. I'd still be sitting in my



Carolyn Gagnon, PT, (left) was part of the VNA Care team who helped Patricia Boyle overcome her fear of falling and regain her life.

chair in the bedroom if they hadn't encouraged me and showed me how to do it," said Patricia. "They gave me my life back. It sounds dramatic, but, honestly, it's not."

## Honorary Gala Chairs

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## Heroes in Health Care raised \$257,000

The Annual Heroes in Health Care Gala benefit was a smashing success, having raised \$257,000 to support VNA Care's vital work of providing unsurpassed, compassionate home health and hospice care for patients and families.

During the evening's many poignant moments, we celebrated our inspiring honorees – Alexandra Drane, Co-founder and CEO of ARCHANGELS, and Lauren A. Smith, MD, MPH, Chief Health Equity & Strategy Officer for the Centers for Disease Control Foundation.

Thank you to Anne Fagan for eloquently paying tribute to VNA Care's hospice team, David Brown for leading our Mission Moment, and to our wonderful performers, Jeremy Green, the Boston Arts Academy's The Spirituals, and Angelena & The Unit.

We are particularly grateful to our Presenting Sponsors, Corridor and Mutual of America, and Trustee Sponsors, Amy and Joshua Boger, our wonderful Honorary Chairs, and Homecare Homebase, as well as to all our volunteer leaders on the gala committees.

To learn about sponsoring the 2024 Heroes Gala, please contact Laura Wise at [Laura\\_Wise@vnacare.org](mailto:Laura_Wise@vnacare.org).



Jane Pike-Benton, COO and CCO, Alexandra Drane, Dr. Lauren A. Smith, and Todd Rose, CEO



Latoyia Edwards of NBC10 Boston and NECN served as emcee.



Gala Committee members and volunteers Renee Picard Walsh, Jessica Piper, Laura Wise, Felicia Avery, Donna Dupee, Marie Sagaille, Dr. Catherine Frasco, and Pat Kelleher



Sponsor Frontline Medical Group (left) were among the guests at the sold out event.







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Renee Harper, board member; Rita Advani, board chair; and Linda Hope Springer, board member and Gala chair



Boston Arts Academy's The Spirituals received a standing ovation for their performance.



Rev. Krysia Bereday Burnham and Anne Fagan  
Photos by Molly Hamill Photography



The Jamieson Family from Presenting Sponsor Jamieson Management

## 26<sup>th</sup> annual Step Out for Hospice rallies community in support of end-of-life care

Walkers and runners had a perfect day to step out on behalf of terminally ill patients and their loved ones. Through the generosity of our sponsors and supporters, more than \$70,000 was raised for hospice care! This special day was presented by the Woburn Friends of VNA Hospice & Palliative Care, the Irish American Club of Woburn, and the Shamrock Running Club. Learn more and get involved in the 27<sup>th</sup> annual walk/run. Visit [www.VNACare.org/StepOut](http://www.VNACare.org/StepOut).

### Presenting Sponsors

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*In Memory of Susan Jamieson and Al & Buddy Coakley*

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Woburn Friends Co-chairs Brian Kelley and Jamie Kelley (left) with runners and walkers from Cambridge Savings Bank, a Gold Sponsor

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Team Lanie Allen brought together multiple generations in support of VNA Care's hospice services.



## VNA Care nurse specialist named Clinician of the Year for Massachusetts

You only need to talk to Susan Carrigan, RN, BSN, WCC, OMS, for a few minutes to understand why she was named Clinician of the Year by the Home Care Alliance of Massachusetts.

She is passionate about ensuring VNA Care's patients receive the best possible care, whether providing it herself, educating colleagues, or deepening her nursing practice.

"It's all about the patients," said Susan. "I love taking care of people. That's where my heart's always been."

Susan's commitment to caring for others took root while working as a medical assistant at a physician's practice. She pursued her nursing degree while working full-time and raising her children. Susan joined VNA Care seven years ago as a home health care nurse, caring for patients with a wide range of complex health concerns.

While VNA Care's visiting nurses work independently in patients' homes, they draw on a wealth of clinical resources, including nurse specialists. Susan's collaboration with a wound, ostomy, and continence nurse specialist inspired her to pursue certification in this field. She was promoted to the position of Wound, Ostomy, Continence (WOC) Nurse Team manager earlier this year. She manages a team of eight WOC nurse specialists, serves as a subject matter expert for her colleagues, and visits patients needing specialized care.

Catherine Frasco, MSPT, DPT, COS-C, vice president of home health operations, said, "Susan treats her work as a true calling, and will tell anyone and everyone that she loves what she does and it's not a job to her."

VNA Care is one of only a few home health care agencies in the state with WOC nurses on staff as a resource for patients and families. These patients' conditions are often life-altering, such as ostomies (an opening in the body



Susan Carrigan, RN, BSN, WCC, OMS, manager of the Wound, Ostomy, and Continence Nurse Team

that allows waste to drain into a bag) or painful wounds that will not heal and interfere with living life fully. When Susan and other members of her team visit a patient, they look beyond the ostomy or wound to get a complete picture of the situation.

"Everybody is an individual," said Susan. "Their home setting is different. Their body is different. They heal differently. I tell patients we're going to keep taking a different approach until we find the one that works for them."

Susan's expertise impacts patients she may never meet. Nancy Ryan, PT, clinical services manager, shared that Susan has "spent countless hours

supporting clinicians and managers with valuable wound care education, best practices, and endless support with challenging cases. I appreciate Susan's support just about every day of the week – she's always available to answer questions and share her expertise."

While Susan is grateful to be recognized as Clinician of the Year, she's quick to point out that everyone at VNA Care is dedicated to helping patients and families receive the best possible care. She added, "I love what I do. I feel that I'm giving patients what they need and deserve."

### State tax deduction back after 20-year hiatus

When you support VNA Care, your gift has an enormous impact on the health of our community. Now, your donation brings one more benefit – a deduction on your Massachusetts state tax returns.

The deduction is "universal," available to all Massachusetts taxpayers regardless of whether they itemize their federal tax return. The deduction is in effect for donations of cash, property or appreciated stocks made in taxable years beginning on or after Jan. 1, 2023.

Please consult your financial professional for advice on how this tax deduction may be used to reduce your state income tax liability.

For more information or assistance with making a donation to VNA Care, please call 508-658-7700 or 617-886-6460.



VNA Care Network  
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### Fund Development Office

100 TradeCenter, Suite G-500  
Woburn, MA 01801

## Family's charitable support honors beloved wife, mother and recognizes extraordinary care provided by Rose Monahan Hospice Home staff

When doctors shared there were no further treatments that would prolong Mary McKeon's life, Don McKeon and his family had no doubt about what they could do to ensure his beloved wife and family received the care and support they needed in their final days together.

"I immediately said, 'We're going to the Rose Monahan Hospice Home,' because of the treatment I had experienced in the past with my father and my aunt,"



Mary McKeon at a wedding in Ireland

remembered Don McKeon of that difficult day.

Mary was transferred from a hospital intensive care unit to the Monahan Home. Nestled on the banks of Coes Pond

in Worcester, the residence was the first of its kind in Central Massachusetts focused solely on the needs of terminally ill patients and their loved ones. The setting feels like an actual home, and the views of the picturesque grounds from each patient room enhances the peaceful atmosphere. The Monahan Home's staff and volunteers provide medical, emotional, practical, and, if desired, spiritual support tailored to each patient and family.

Mary was known as a loving mother to everyone, even the neighborhood children. She and Don were married for 50 years, and had four children and 12 grandchildren. Don remembered that family and friends alike felt welcomed at the Monahan Home, and spent time at Mary's bedside.

Don said, "You couldn't ask for more compassion and care not only directed at the patient but at the entire family. If we needed something, all we'd

have to do was mention it, and it happened."

In appreciation of the hospice staff's care, Don asked that donations in Mary's memory be made to the Rose Monahan Hospice Home. Charitable gifts enable the residence to serve patients in need, maintain the home to promote the comfort and safety of patients and loved ones, and much more.

Years later, Don continues to support the Monahan Home's work as a donor and also gives his time. He most recently refinished a bench dedicated to a longtime family friend, Mary Whalen, who was instrumental in establishing the residence before retiring from her role as vice president of hospice.

He remains grateful for the clinicians and the residence, and added, "They couldn't have taken better care of Mary or of us."