

# Caring Matters

Winter 2024-25

## Patient defies all expectations, learns to walk again with VNA Care

One doctor after another told Diane Bowers that she would probably never walk again.

Complications from surgery to repair a life-threatening, leaking artery in her abdomen as well as low blood pressure during recovery are thought to have contributed to damage and weakness in her spine.

She was transferred from the hospital to a rehabilitation facility, where staff eventually switched their focus from helping Diane walk again to teaching her how to be successful using a wheelchair at home. Every day, Diane prayed for just one good leg to help her accomplish many of the things she used to be able to handle on her own.

"Everyone said you have such a great attitude," remembered Diane. "I wanted to tell them that it's because I'm not going to be like this much longer. I just had faith."

Her prayers were soon answered. After Diane returned home, a friend passed along VNA Care's phone number. The agency has a long track record of helping patients with challenging and complex diagnoses improve functioning and reach their optimal health while living independently at home.

Marie Davis, PT, a longtime physical therapist with VNA Care, was assigned to assess Diane's condition.

During their first visit, Diane asked Marie if she thought she'd ever stand again. Diane was astounded by Marie's response, "You're going to stand today."

Diane was instructed to put her hands on Marie's shoulders, and the physical therapist helped her from her wheelchair to a standing position multiple times.

"That was a major accomplishment in my eyes. I don't know if it was the way she did it, her calmness, or her upbeat personality, but she had this look of 'we are going to be successful today,'" said Diane.

Over the course of several months, Marie helped Diane make steady

progress. Diane mastered transitioning from sitting to standing using a walker.

On another visit, she took her first two steps using a walker and eventually accomplished what doctors never expected – walking laps around her house with a walker for balance and stability.

The milestones didn't stop there. Marie helped Diane learn different ways to safely perform tasks she once took for granted. Standing at the kitchen counter to make her own coffee again brought Diane to tears.

Stairs were the final challenge. Diane was limited to the first floor of her home and hadn't been able to sleep

*Patient defies expectations...continued on page 2*



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It was my lucky day when Marie (Davis, PT) walked into my house and took on my case. She is amazing.  
-Diane Bowers

## Rose Monahan Hospice Home staff supports couple during last months together...continued from back cover

consensus was that Dolly would not want the procedure. As Dennis prepared himself to lose his partner of 36 years and wife of 26 years within just a few hours, a miracle happened. Dolly's vital signs suddenly returned to normal. However, the ordeal had taken an enormous toll on Dolly's health. Hospital staff suggested the couple consider hospice, a specialized area of health care that supports both patients and loved ones throughout the end-of-life journey.

The hospital social worker recommended VNA Care, which provides hospice care in patients' homes and the Rose Monahan Hospice Home. Dolly would receive pain and symptom management geared to keeping her as comfortable as possible, and both Dolly and Dennis could access emotional, spiritual, practical and social support. VNA Care helped Dolly transition first from the hospital to her own home and then a few weeks later to the Rose Monahan Hospice Home where her needs could be better met.

The residence, located on a quiet cul-de-sac overlooking Worcester's Coes Pond, offers calm, comfortable surroundings for individuals of all ages. The community's generosity made it possible for VNA Care to open the residence in 1997, and donor support remains essential to



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The care my wife's receiving and the level of involvement and consideration the staff has for everybody in the family is pretty extraordinary.

-Dennis Asselin

*Pictured with Ellen Cellini, RN, BSN, (left) and Sheyla Acevedo, Hospice Aide (right)*

the day-to-day operations of what is the only hospice residence in Central Massachusetts.

Dennis jokes that he's "become part of the woodwork" at the Monahan Home. He visits daily to be with his wife. He appreciates that staff have taken the time to get to know Dolly. Dennis said, "She was full of life and always on the go. She skied with me until she was in her mid-70s. She wasn't afraid of anything. She always had a smile on her face. She's quite a woman."

The Rose Monahan Hospice Home nurses, including Amy Daley, RN, CHPN, Hospice Clinical Services Manager; Ellen Cellini, RN, BSN, Nurse Team Leader; and Erica Grady, RN, Residence Hospice Nurse,

keep Dennis informed about Dolly's condition and any changes in her medications. He feels comfortable asking questions and sharing his observations. When he can't be there, he has peace of mind knowing trained hospice volunteers are available to provide companionship to Dolly. The couple receives additional support from Ted MacNeil, MDV, MS, Hospice Spiritual Counselor, and Glen Degere, LICSW, Hospice Social Worker.

"As hard as it is when I leave, I know she's in good hands," said Dennis. "The care my wife's receiving and the level of involvement and consideration the staff has for everybody in the family is pretty extraordinary. The Monahan Home is a Godsend."

## Patient defies all expectations, learns to walk again with VNA Care...continued from front cover

in her second floor bedroom since her hospitalization. When she couldn't lift her foot enough to step up, Marie had Diane sit on the stairs instead and scoot her way up. Marie was with her every step, and had a chair waiting at the top so Diane could rest.

By the time Diane was ready to transition to outpatient rehabilitation therapy, she was able to walk a few steps without a walker. Her new goal, to take her dog Tootsie for walks on the beach, was within reach thanks

to the incredible progress she made under Marie's expert care.

Diane said, "It was my lucky day when Marie walked into my house and took on my case. She is amazing."

*Pictured: Marie Davis, PT, (right) guides Diane Bowers in a sit-to-stand exercise to strengthen her lower body and improve her mobility and independence.*



# Meaningful evening lauds the impact of donor-supported patient care

VNA Care and the Worcester Community Cabinet are grateful to our wonderful friends, supporters, and community partners for making the annual Celebration of Caring an incredibly successful evening. Together we raised \$80,000 for home health, palliative, and hospice care in the community and the Rose Monahan Hospice Home!

VNA Care clinicians Lisa Sternstrom, OT/L, and Regina Cunningham, BSN, RN, CHPN, Hospice Nurse, provided moving perspectives on the ways VNA Care, through donor support, impacts people's lives at crucial times – whether making it possible for a frail elder to remain in their own home or a terminally ill patient to live with dignity.



From left: Evan Rappa, Liisa Holm, and Dena McDonough from Presenting Sponsor Marsh McLennan Agency

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Linda Maykel, Advocate Sponsor and member of the Worcester Cabinet, (left) and Sandra Lian

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Mary Whalen, Caregiver Sponsor and member of the Worcester Cabinet, (left) and Caragh Whalen Feinblatt

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# Heroes in Health Care raises \$220,000

Thanks to our supporters, we had an unforgettable evening on Saturday, Nov. 2. Hundreds of guests joined us for a sold-out annual Heroes in Health Care Gala at the Mandarin Oriental, Boston.

All funds raised at the Heroes Gala fuel VNA Care's mission to deliver unsurpassed home-based healthcare for patients and families across Massachusetts. This benefit has raised nearly \$4.5 million in charitable giving to advance patient care over the years.

At the heart of the Gala was our awards program, celebrating visionary leaders who place dignity, trust, and compassion at the core of health care. VNA Care was proud to honor **Dr. Nancy E. Oriol, MD**, Co-founder of The Family Van and Faculty Associate Dean for Community Engagement at Harvard Medical School and **Dr. Vin Gupta, MD, MPA**, Chief Medical Officer for Amazon Pharmacy and NBC/MSNBC Medical Analyst as this year's Heroes in Health Care.

We are particularly grateful to all of our generous sponsors, including Corridor and Mutual of America, and Amy and Joshua Boger. Thank you to Dr. Mallika Marshall for emceeding the event, David Brown for leading our Mission Moment, the volunteer leaders on the gala committees, and our wonderful performers, the BAA's The Spirituals, Sugar & the Essential Spice, and the Michele Zimmerman Trio. To learn about sponsoring the 2025 Heroes Gala, please contact Laura Wise at [Laura\\_Wise@VNAcare.org](mailto:Laura_Wise@VNAcare.org)



From left: Dr. Vin Gupta, Laura Wise of VNA Care, Dr. Nancy Oriol, and Renee Picard Walsh



Presenting Sponsor Corridor with Todd Rose, CEO, and Robin Seidman, CCO, of VNA Care



Gala Committee Members (from left): Debra Angeloni-Reilly, Dr. Catherine Frasco, Patricia Kelleher, Barbara Belony, Jeff Swatkins, Eisha George, Michelle Sofi, Maria Fontellio, and Renee Picard Walsh, Chair



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Dr. Catherine Frasco, VP Home Health, of VNA Care (left) and Reyna Aufiero of Frontline Medical Group, a Supporter Sponsor



Rev. Krysia Bereday Burnham of VNA Care (left) and Tessa Skinner-Velazquez



Boston Arts Academy's The Spirituals and Director Michael Bradley

Photos by Molly Hamill Photography



Woburn Friends Co-Chairs Brian Kelley (left) and Jamie Kelley (right) with their parents Brian and Deborah Kelley



Team members from Mooney Dental, a Gold Sponsor, took part in the 3-mile walk.



Barbara McElhiney, member of the Woburn Friends, and Marietta E. Lynch, a Gold Sponsor



Carole Torrice of the Woburn Friends draws the winning raffle tickets.

## Walk/run raises vital funds for end-of-life care

The Woburn Friends of VNA Hospice & Palliative Care organized one of their most successful benefits to date. The 27th annual Step Out for Hospice raised more than \$83,000 for end-of-life care through the generosity of businesses, community organizations, and individual supporters. Hosted by the Irish American Club of Woburn, the fundraiser featured a Fun Run for kids, 3-mile walk, 5-mile road race, live music by The Offramps, silent auction, raffle, and more. Visit [www.VNACare.org/StepOut](http://www.VNACare.org/StepOut) for the complete sponsor list and race results as well as ways to support next year's benefit as a sponsor or volunteer.

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# VNA Care's hospice team "simply amazing" as they help family navigate end-stage Alzheimer's with nursing, social work, and other supports

Marie Leduc's only wish was to remain at home with her family as she faced Alzheimer's disease.

It was the same wish she and her family fulfilled for her own mother, Rose, when she received the same shattering diagnosis.

"We're a very close-knit family," shared Laurie Barnes, Marie's daughter. "I saw the progression of the disease with my grandmother. To then see everything happen with my mom, it was devastating."

Laurie remembers her mother as a sweet, gentle, family-oriented woman with endless amounts of love for her husband Robert, three children, and six grandchildren. She was part of Assabet Valley Regional High School's support staff for more than 30 years, retiring in 2016 and inducted into Assabet's Hall of Achievement the following year for her contributions to the school.

It was during retirement that Marie's memory began failing, and she was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Marie shared with her family that she wanted to remain at home throughout the course of her disease, and Laurie was determined to make her wish a reality.

Laurie saw the disease progress far more quickly with her mother than with her grandmother. When Marie's time was limited to months instead of years, her doctor suggested the family enlist the support of VNA Care.

Our nonprofit's hospice clinicians and volunteers receive advanced education in meeting the specialized needs of individuals and loved ones facing end-stage dementias, including Alzheimer's disease. The team relieves pain, controls symptoms, provides emotional and spiritual support, and much more to support a peaceful end-of-life journey. Families are supported before and after their loss.



My mother wanted to pass away at home, and VNA Care's hospice helped me honor her wishes.

-Laurie Barnes

*Pictured: Marie Leduc*



As Laurie got to know the hospice team, she discovered "they were all simply amazing and so compassionate."

Katie Mechan, Hospice RN Case Manager, took the lead in coordinating the Leduc family's care. Laurie said Katie was "so helpful and knowledgeable" every step of the way. Katie's advice helped Laurie and her family promote Marie's quality of life. Her recommendations included such things as giving Marie a fidget apron with different textures and activities, like zippers and buttons, that would provide calming sensory stimulation.

Lauren Abraham, LICSW, Hospice Social Worker, was an ongoing source of support for the family and ensured they were comfortable with and understood what to expect in the coming months. Marion Kettell, Hospice Aide, assisted with Marie's personal care and other day-to-day activities. Lauren said Marion "has a heart of gold." A hospice volunteer served as a companion for both Marie and her husband Robert, who particularly enjoyed playing cribbage with the volunteer during her visits.

The hospice team's care and support over nearly four months enabled

Laurie to continue working, and, most importantly, feel comfortable that her mother was in good hands when they were apart. Robert appreciated the opportunity to have some time for himself without worrying about Marie's safety and wellbeing. If they had any questions or concerns, the hospice team was always available. When Marie's end-of-life journey was nearing its end, the hospice team prepared the entire family for what to expect and Laurie was able to take time off from work to remain by her mother's side. Marie died peacefully at home at the age of 77.

Laurie is grateful for everything the hospice team did for her mother and her family. She said, "My mother wanted to pass away at home, and VNA Care's hospice helped me honor her wishes."

## How to reach us

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

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

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3 Celebration of Caring



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### Fund Development Office

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## Couple finds extraordinary care and support at the Rose Monahan Hospice Home during their last months together

Dennis Asselin accepted an opening at the Rose Monahan Hospice Home sight unseen for his wife Dolores "Dolly" Wright-Asselin.

He knew the residence only by reputation, having spoken to several people whose loved ones had received exceptional end-of-life care there.

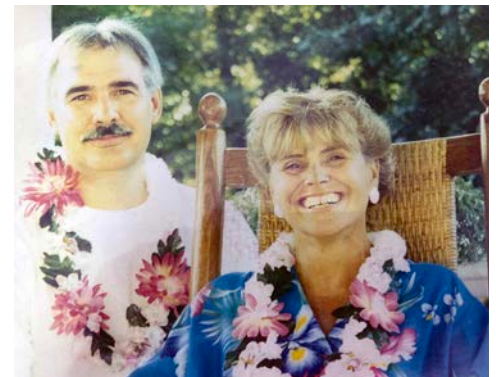
"The Monahan staff put me at ease pretty quickly," remembered Dennis. "They told me not to worry about her eating, her medications, or who would do this or that for her. They said, 'You show up and be there for her, and we'll take care of the rest.' That really helped a lot."

Dolly's health began declining three years ago when she suffered a stroke and was diagnosed with vascular dementia, a condition that can cause problems with memory, thinking, and behavior. Rehabilitation therapy helped her regain her ability to walk

with Dennis nearby in case she lost her balance. They loved to travel, and Dolly's improved health allowed them to return to their Maine vacation home, visit family in Florida and New Mexico, and even venture to a favorite destination - the Bahamas.

Dennis remembered being "blindsided" last February when Dolly's home health aide began yelling for him to call 911. Dolly was unresponsive, and EMTs rushed her to the emergency room. She remained unconscious while a doctor explained an invasive procedure that may help Dolly. Dennis also drew on the expertise of his niece, a nurse practitioner, who joined the conversation via conference call.

Dolly had always told Dennis she didn't want any extraordinary means taken to prolong her life. Her wishes guided the conversation, and the



Dennis and Dolly Asselin were together for a decade before marrying 26 years ago in Hawaii. When Dolly's health began failing, they turned to the Rose Monahan Hospice Home for compassionate care in homelike surroundings.

*Monahan Home...continued on page 2*