

Message from the President

Carol Annett ~ CEO & President, VHA Home HealthCare

From our clients who still manage a smile or a joke in the face of adversity, to the caregivers who tirelessly support them, to our own dedicated team who are always willing to go the extra mile: heroic acts of bravery, sacrifice and devotion are part of daily life in home health care.



Margaret Verdis, our 2010 recipient of VHA's Heroes in the Home Award is no exception. For the past 23 years she's given time, patience and unwavering love to her husband Frank, who was left mentally and physically impaired after an acquired brain injury. Margaret and Frank's touching journey is featured in this edition and is certainly a compelling story that won't soon be forgotten.

In June the commitment of our VHA team was put to the ultimate test. The chaos of the G20 Summit weekend was unexpected but something that—with the incredible support of Toronto Central CCAC—we were well-prepared to handle.

There are countless stories of VHA heroes who went above and beyond the call of duty. Stories of staff and service providers who walked kilometers through the downtown core, were trapped on subways and streetcars, or who passed through protests—all to reach clients in need of care. Many managers, supervisors and office staff also worked around the clock to ensure the safety of our workers and clients. The collective response during the G20 reinforces what an incredible team of dedicated professionals we have working at VHA. Though they may not wear bright capes or have supersonic powers, it's clear that "quiet" heroism from clients, to caregivers and to our own workers is alive and well at VHA.



Up Close and Personal

VHA's Heroes in the Home Winner

“ I wake up. It's dark. I don't know what time it is—don't know where I am. I'm lost. I reach over to touch Margarita. She's not there. I am alone. I try to get out of bed. I roll and push and almost fall. I hold myself steady. It's not easy. Nothing is easy. I am out of breath. I used to be wonderful, but not anymore...”

Though the words may be fictional, the confused and challenging world Frank Verdis lives in is real. *Frankie's World* is a touching account of Frank's daily life written by his wife Margaret Verdis—this year's winner of VHA Home HealthCare's Heroes in the Home Award.

Margaret and her husband Frank Verdis celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary this July. The pair first met at their best friends' wedding in Montreal and their own wedding followed soon after. They were living a happy life together with their two children when their lives were suddenly changed forever.

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In January 1987, on the eve of their daughter's wedding, Frank, then 56, woke up with a small headache. He didn't think anything of it. Being the "stubborn Greek man that he is," as Margaret describes him, he refused to go to the hospital when it worsened. But when the pain hadn't settled by the next morning, he finally went to the emergency room. A CAT scan revealed an abscess on the left side of Frank's brain, which resulted in an acquired brain injury (ABI) that left him cognitively and physically debilitated.

"After that happened, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know how to make it better," Margaret says. "It was supposed to be a happy time. Family from Greece was coming in for the wedding. Instead, it was very depressing. We were living a different life in the intensive care unit—we closed everything else off."

After two operations and six months in the hospital, Frank was ready to go home. Margaret knew Frank had changed forever and would need round-the-clock care.



A Feisty Adventurer and Entrepreneur

Frank left his native Greece and moved to Canada in July 1951, just shy of age 21. He came seeking adventure, not planning to stay. He was a professional driver by trade, owning and operating both trucks and a taxi business which came to a close in 1987 due to his ABI.

"Being a very skilled driver, he has never accepted that he can no longer drive, and has an unequalled road rage if I don't drive to his liking—which is impossible," says Margaret.

Deciphering a Confused World

Frank lives in a world that is not familiar to him; as the story *Frankie's World* clearly conveys, Frank spends much of his time telling whoever will listen, "I'm lost." For years Margaret would take Frank back home to Greece for family vacations. Once, while there, Frank spent a few tranquil moments to take in the surroundings of his "old country" upbringing. He paused and then turned to Margaret and said, "now I know where I am." It's a story that still brings tears to Margaret's eyes. Tears that no doubt come from a deeper place—one of profound sadness for the memories lost and for the intense stress Frank feels having to live in a world where memories are fleeting and daily living is a string of disconnected, illogical events.

"What day is it? Do I work today?"

"Monday. Today is Monday.

You don't work till tomorrow."

"I want to remember. I try but I can't."

"What day is it today?"

"Monday, today is Monday. Try to remember."

"Why do you tell me that? Don't you know I have my trouble? I try but I can't remember. I am lost..."

Caregiver Relief

Frank's daily needs became Margaret's daily activities. She found herself in need of relief. Fortunately, Margaret receives support from the Etobicoke Services for Seniors (ESS) Adult Day Service (ADS) for which she is eternally grateful. Having time to herself helps give her the patience she needs to care for Frank, whose stubbornness sometimes borders on aggression. She even volunteers at another ADS program for ESS. For his part, Frank attends his ADS four days a week calling it "his work."

“Although Frank’s short term memory is close to none—there is one thing he does know and that is how wonderful the people are at ‘his work,’” says Margaret. “My life is similar to a yin-yang, both black and white, it’s still mostly good because of the help I have.”

Both Margaret’s daughter and granddaughter came to support Margaret during her acceptance of VHA’s Heroes in the Home Award to let her know how proud her family is to have such a remarkable woman in their lives.

“Margaret responds to the needs of her husband with such compassion, strength, and outstanding dedication on a day-to-day basis,” says President and CEO of VHA, Carol Annett. “Her story is an inspiration to all caregivers. It reminds us that care giving is not always a choice, but that it can bring out the very best in people.”




Eye on Quality

VHA Performance and Process Improvements

The Quality Improvement and Risk Management Committee is currently focused on standardizing communication of performance results to the front lines and enhancing our emergency management program. We are proud to report that over the last few months we have:

1. Enhanced Accountability for Performance Results.

Based on VHA Rehab Solutions’ performance reporting system—which has been in place for years—we created new performance reports for personal support that break down results at departmental, team, individual and supervisor levels. These reports highlight how well standards and expectations are met, compare individual and team performances and track improvements. We’re developing similar reporting for nursing to roll out later this year.

2. Improved our Emergency Management Program.

A flood simulation at all of our offices tested evacuation and office relocation procedures. Simulation of a major power failure evaluated our ability to get organization-wide messages out. The recent earthquake and G20 events were real-life emergencies that put our existing plans to the test and revealed our preparedness. We’ve identified areas for improvement and are making changes to our emergency plan and training content to reflect these results.

We welcome your support!

Membership

VHA welcomes new associate members and encourages people in the community to get involved with VHA. Our membership fee of \$25 can be waived in special circumstances. Please contact Patricia Triantafilou at 416.489.2500 or patricia@vha.ca.

Donations

Charitable donations to VHA Home HealthCare make a meaningful difference in the lives of people in need. Donations are welcome online, by mail, phone or in person. Our sincerest thanks for your generosity.



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VHA PROFESSIONAL STAFF/SERVICE PROVIDERS

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- Physiotherapists
- Registered Nurses/Registered Practical Nurses
- Social Workers
- Speech-Language Pathologists
- Client Service Coordinators/Supervisors
- Other Skilled Professionals as Required

VHA Home HealthCare is a member agency of United Way Toronto and a contracted provider with Toronto Central, Central, Central East, Central West, South West, Mississauga Halton, Champlain, and Erie St. Clair CCACs, the City of Toronto's Homemakers and Nurses Services program and the Regional Municipality of Durham.



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