

Newsletter Fall 2018

VNA | Visiting Nurse Association
Easterseals Nebraska

Shaping tomorrow's care.
Today.

Celebrating Life!

Joanie Kush's 40 years at
VNA and the growth of
hospice care (page 6).

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An alliance dedicated to enhancing the
health and lives of those we serve

A small animal is often an excellent companion for the sick.

(Florence Nightingale, 1859)

I've personally witnessed the powerful human impact gained through the unconditional love of a dog. My two-year-old standard poodle, Gilligan, is a trained and certified therapy dog. Together, we've visited hospitals, Alzheimer's patients, homeless shelters, and schools. Not surprisingly, Gilligan's presence makes people smile, but I've also seen agitated patients become calm, those with dementia briefly return to the present, and children with learning disabilities thrive when given the opportunity to read to my furry, four-legged friend.

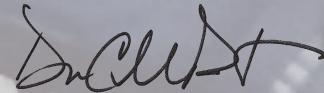
Historically, Sigmund Freud wrote about the relaxing impact his dog, Jofi, had on patients. Dr. Boris Levinson is considered the modern-day father of pet therapy, and published multiple articles regarding his optimistic findings from integrating his dog, Jingles, into therapy sessions with non-verbal or low-functioning adolescent patients. Today, research continues to explore and explain positive outcomes when people on the autism and dementia spectrum, plus those with PTSD, medical difficulties, behavioral challenges, or mental health issues, interact with animals.

This newsletter issue highlights VNA's amazing hospice program. One of the remarkable offerings of this well-rounded program is volunteer pet therapy. Knowing this, Gilligan and I recently completed training to become VNA hospice volunteers. This means Gilligan, along with his furry colleagues Gus, Bailey, Harley, MacKenzie, and semi-retired Hattie, will be available to make visits in homes or VNA partnered local care facilities like Hospice House – The Josie

Harper Residence to bring joy and comfort to hospice patients and their families. It's our small contribution to the rapidly growing impact of VNA's hospice and palliative care programming in the Omaha Community.

I believe after reading this issue, you'll want to contribute to hospice too. The dollars you donate will directly support hospice services for those who can't afford it for themselves. The uninsured, the underinsured, the unemployed, the impoverished – all deserve to fully live until they die - without the loss of dignity, and without the loss of choices. Thank you, in advance, for helping VNA provide care.

If you want to contribute your time, Gilligan and I highly recommend becoming VNA hospice volunteers. You do not need a therapy pet to share your time with hospice patients; your caring attendance is enough. The next volunteer training will be held in March 2019. More information is available about this important role at vnatoday.org/get-involved/volunteer/ or by calling 402-930-4261 and asking for a hospice volunteer coordinator.



Dr. Carole Patrick, Vice President of Fund Development and Communications with Gilligan

From VNA President and CEO, James Summerfelt

Hospice is about living.



James C. Summerfelt, M.Ed.,
MSPT, president and CEO

One of the greatest myths surrounding hospice care is that the patient and family have given up and hospice is the final surrender. At VNA, we believe hospice is about living until one's last breath. It's about honoring

last wishes and achieving final goals in a collaborative effort between the patient, the family, the hospice team, and the doctor.

Choosing hospice and palliative care can mean avoiding unwanted hospitalizations, medical treatments and procedures while achieving pain management and comfort. Hospice can also ease the financial burden that often accompanies end-of-life care.

In 1982, Congress initiated the hospice benefit under TEFRA (Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act), a landmark public policy decision to include hospice care in the Medicare program. Yet the National Hospice Foundation has stated that 90% of Americans don't realize that hospice care can be fully covered through Medicare, Medicaid, and/or private insurance.

VNA is the largest hospice provider in the state of Nebraska, and we proudly advocate the powerful impact of choice for those facing end-of-life. That includes choosing to remain at home and choosing what's important, who is important, and how one wants to spend his/her time.

With hospice and palliative care, even when a cure is no longer viable, therapies that improve symptoms and raise comfort can continue. Quality of life becomes the mindset, and our patients can focus on relationships, personal legacy, achieving a sense of closure, and realizing goals.

This newsletter shines light on an aspect of healthcare that is often perceived with fear and misunderstanding. At VNA, hospice is a philosophy of care that celebrates life to the end. I hope you are encouraged and enlightened as you read.

James C Summerfelt

On Birth and Dying

As a hospice and palliative medicine provider, I often sit with patients and family members for long periods of time. We discuss their goals, plans, expectations, hopes and fears, and how these all relate to their healthcare and overall well-being. We make a plan for what might occur after their next hospitalization, or discuss what the signs of end-of-life might look like for their loved one. I provide education and support, reassuring the patient and their caregivers that no matter the decision or outcome, I will continue to walk with them until their journey is complete.



Prior to focusing my efforts on hospice and palliative medicine, I was trained as a family medicine doctor. One of my responsibilities during my three years in family medicine was to provide obstetrical care. At times the women I cared for were pregnant for the first time, while others were preparing to welcome their fifth child. During the approximately 40 weeks I would spend with a woman, we also sat and discussed goals, plans, expectations, hopes and fears related to her prenatal care and care of her newborn baby.

After I transitioned from family medicine to hospice and palliative medicine, I had a conversation with a colleague who mentioned how different the two fields are. My colleague commented how difficult it must have been to shift my focus to the end of a person's life after being a part of the amazing process at the beginning of life. It was then I realized – and described to my colleague – that the process was actually quite similar. While the context and the outcome are clearly different, my role in the process remains the same.

In birth, and in dying, there is a sense of anticipation at a "new reality", one where a person envisions being forever changed, by either the addition or loss of a family member. There is a sense of anxiety about being forced into this change; there is no going back. Such feelings can accumulate so quickly it can feel overwhelming. "How will I ever get through this?" is a common question, both of expectant mothers but also of hospice patients. Family members wonder, "What will my life be like after this is over?" These emotions may be accompanied by a sense of guilt for not living presently in the moment, in the same way a mother may regret her longing to "be done with" pregnancy and able to hold her little one.

Our bodies are meant to come into the world, and that process is often celebrated. But it is through a fine balance with loss that we experience such great joy at the beginning of life. Our bodies are also meant to leave this world, and I am there for my patients and their families as they transition to what is next. Everything changes and everything is connected; I consider it a great honor to provide them with the attention they deserve at this important time.

Dr. Erin Dahlke
Hospice Physician

What is hospice?

Hospice focuses on physical, psychological, social and spiritual well-being of patients and their loved ones. Patients may receive care at their home (including a private home, nursing home, or residential facility), a hospice inpatient facility, or an acute care hospital.

Who is eligible for hospice?

A patient is eligible for hospice care if his/her primary physician and the hospice medical director determine the patient has a prognosis of six months or less (if the disease follows its normal course). In addition, the patient must have decided to choose a palliative rather than curative approach to treatment.

How do I pay for hospice?

Hospice care is covered 100% by Medicare, Medicaid, or many insurance plans. The VNA team works with those who are uninsured or have a gap in insurance. The hospice benefit provides 24-hour support, education, and symptom management in addition to medication, supplies, and equipment related to the terminal disease. Multidisciplinary care includes a physician, nurse, social workers, chaplains, aides, and specialty services (such as therapy, wound care, or a dietician). Volunteers and bereavement counselors are also available to provide support through the hospice journey.



Left to right: Dr. Howard Edwards, Dr. Erin Dahlke, Dr. Todd Sauer, VNA Hospice Physician Team



Hospice is quality symptom management and end-of-life care that is specifically designated for patients with a prognosis of less than six months. Palliative care provides the same specialty level symptom management and supportive care without the need for any specific prognosis. Palliative care has been shown to both improve quality of life and comfort as well as to prolong life.



Dr. Todd Sauer
Hospice Medical Director

Celebrating Life!

When Joanie Kush was a teenager, she visited her 86-year-old grandfather who lived in a nursing home. He had died during an afternoon nap, but the chaos that ensued when Joanie found him revealed a staff ill-equipped to support a teenager experiencing death for the first time. "They missed the opportunity to affirm his life and show me death is beautiful. I knew there had to be a better way."

This year, VNA celebrated a milestone with Kush: 40 years of employment and finding a "better way" for her patients, her staff, and her community. Today, she is VNA's Vice President of Hospice, Palliative Care and Pharmacy. Forty years ago, she started as an LPN working with newborns. She went on to practice nursing in schools, at elderly clinics, and as a case manager. After receiving her RN degree in 1982, there was an opening on the VNA hospice team where Kush has served ever since.

"It doesn't feel like 40 years. In all honesty, it feels new each year because I'm passionate about our work."

A large part of that passion is focused on encouraging patients to celebrate their lives to the end. That means supporting holistic well-being and the progression of life. It means always asking what's important to the patient. And it means educating the community, families and physicians that hospice is about living.

Under Kush's leadership, VNA's hospice and palliative care is continually impacting the community. "Our CEO, Jamie Summerfelt, likes to quote Wayne Gretzky to our leadership team. You skate to where the puck is going to be, not to where it's been," she shares. "Evolving and growing as a hospice provider means we need to be aware. Be present. We can't rest on stability, and we are always reaching for change."

Joanie's personal perspective impacts how she leads her hospice team. It's an outlook that grew out of experiences beyond her initial education and employment. In 1993, after receiving VNA's Mary Longmaid Offutt Award, Joanie traveled to England and gained additional hospice training through St. Christopher's Hospice and Dr. Cicely Saunders, the founder of modern-day hospice. In 1997, she completed her Master's degree practicum at the San Francisco VNA and visited patients in the Castro area through the Zen Hospice Project. Through it all, her prevailing mindset is quality patient care.

"Our VNA hospice team will go to great lengths to meet patient goals," she explains. "They are tenacious advocates for patient choices at the end-of-life. As caregivers, they give everything to patients and expect that same commitment of each other. I believe in them, and I know they are the reason for our success."

For more information about VNA Hospice – improving quality of life by addressing physical, social, emotional and spiritual needs at the end of life – go to vnatoday.org/services/hospice-care

Kush was part of the steering committee to start Omaha's Hospice House – The Josie Harper Residence, and has also been a consultant for hospice start-ups in Spirit Lake and Columbus. "We were told when starting Hospice House that community partners couldn't succeed together in a hospice facility. But since 1998, we've proven them wrong, as VNA, CHI Health, Nebraska Medicine and Methodist built a non-profit hospice where we all focus on providing the best end-of-life care."

Through a series of partnerships over the last two years, VNA has become the largest hospice provider in the state of Nebraska. VNA assumed service delivery of Home Care and Hospice for Memorial Community Hospital & Health System in Blair, for Methodist Health System, helps to manage Fremont home health and hospice

and incorporated operations of Hospice of Southwest Iowa under the VNA umbrella. The decision to consolidate efficiencies with VNA recognized three decades of expertise as a certified hospice provider and trusted community partner.

According to Kush, the significant growth of VNA's Hospice has come with added responsibility, but no compromise in quality. "We adhere to standards of care and excellence of care. And all decisions are made with patients at the center."

"I'm so lucky. I've worked all these years, and every day, I get to make a difference. I get to work in a field where we celebrate life; and where compassion and care matter daily."



Joanie Kush, Vice President of Hospice and Pharmacy, accepting her 40 year Pin with James Summerfelt



Hospice House - The Josie Harper Residence

At times, individuals with serious illness need care that cannot be provided in their own home. For these individuals, Hospice House — The Josie Harper Residence offers care and a place to call home.

The mission of Hospice House is to embrace residents living with serious illnesses and their families and friends with compassionate care and comfort. Hospice House staff also provide end-of-life education in the community.

Visiting Nurse Association is a sponsoring partner of Hospice House, alongside CHI Health, Methodist Hospital, and Nebraska Medicine.

Because of You

Because of you, VNA can provide care for everyone — no matter their age or ability. The contribution you make today helps shape tomorrow's care for those who need it the most. Please consider a donation through this newsletter's remittance envelope or online at vnatoday.org/donate. Your generosity changes lives.

Remembering Roy

by Steve Stapp

My father, Roy, lived with us in our home for over 11 years after suffering from a stroke. He lost his short-term memory and was unable to care for himself. But he never lost his sense of humor or his love of family. He lived to be a month short of 95. We were blessed to share our home with him, and miss him dearly. Dad's health slowly deteriorated, but no matter what, we knew that we did not want to put him in a home - his home was our home.

During those years, my family and I received great counsel from dad's physician. I was concerned that I wouldn't know when to ask for hospice help, but people who have gone through this process before confided, "You will know." They were right.

The VNA team answered all our questions, kept in contact with others on dad's team, and helped us let dad pass in a very controlled, compassionate, and respectful manner. VNA's hospice team met all of dad's needs as his time on earth came to an end.



Roy and Steve Stapp



VNA Proud & United

For nearly a century, VNA and United Way of the Midlands have partnered to provide services in our community, helping over 5,000 people each year. Thanks to the generosity of United Way donors, VNA offers programs that serve the metro area's most vulnerable residents, who are often turned away due to inability to pay or complexity of needs. This year, VNA received \$515,000 from United Way of the Midlands to fund programming for Home Health Aide, Maternal-Infant Home Health Care, Home Health Care, and Maternal-Child Home Visitation services.

You can watch VNA's new video to understand the impact your United Way donation has on our clients by going to vnatoday.org/unitedway.

VNA ON THE GO

VNA staff members are continually on the go – impacting the community, touching vulnerable lives, and proudly representing our organization. This summer, staff members were asked to share their ON THE GO photos. Here's a few of our favorites. We are #VNAProud!





Easterseals Nebraska Camp: Experiencing Firsts

Experiencing and conquering "firsts" is what Easterseals Nebraska (ESN) camp is all about; whether it is a "first" for a counselor, camper or camper's family. This summer, Sami, first year ESN counselor, got to see her sister swim, ride a horse, and soar high above the ground on the Flying Squirrel for the first time. "This summer was the first time I got to go swimming with my sister! I knew she attended camp each year, but never got to see her experience it until I became an ESN counselor," says Sami.

ESN Camp transforms campers' self-identity and expands what they thought was possible. There is an excitement, nervousness and overpowering feeling of accomplishment once campers achieve something for the first time; especially if it didn't seem possible. "I love seeing the campers push each other to do activities and cheer each other on," Aaron, third year counselor says. Camp is the one place where campers feel accepted and challenged outside of their norm, experience new activities with their peers and evolve their independence.

ESN Camp experienced something for the first time this year as well; we had over 225 campers! ESN Camp serves campers of all ages and disability types. Many campers have multiple disabilities and require high staff to camper ratio to ensure their safety and ability to participate. Community generosity made the camp experience possible for many this year. If you haven't supported ESN camp before, please make this your first time by donating via the attached envelope or online at vnatoday.org/ESNcamps.



Gavin and Camp Counselor Aaron



Camp Counselor Gina and Kaitlyn



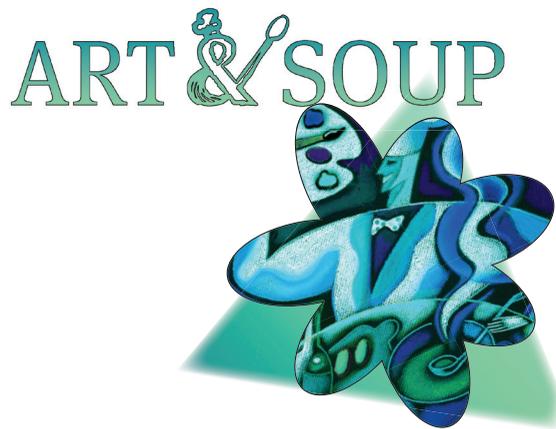
Sami and Brianna

Events

VNA Flu Clinic

Monday through Thursday, until November 15
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. & 4:00 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
VNA Headquarters
12565 West Center Rd, Suite 100

Did you know when you get your flu shot at VNA, you protect yourself from the flu AND help the community? All proceeds are reinvested back into the community so everyone, no matter their station in life or available resources, can receive expert, compassionate care.



Sunday, February 24, 2019
Patron Party 1 – 2 pm; Art & Soup 2 – 5pm
Embassy Suites La Vista
12520 Westport Pkwy, La Vista, NE 68128

Taste incredible soups and desserts created by local Omaha and Council Bluffs chefs. Buy original artwork from area artists who donate 50% of their art sales to VNA's Shelter Nursing Program. Bid on silent auction items and packages! Visit vnatoday.org to learn more.

For questions, email reaton@vnatoday.org or call 402.930.4170.

VNA welcomes two new members to our Board of Directors!



Kelly Butts-Elston
CEO, Connections/SW 8
Senior Services



Carrie Phillips
Service Leader, Care
Mgmt/Inpt Dialysis,
NE Methodist

Current board members include the following.

Karen Bruzzano, Sr. VP Client Engagement, West Corporation
Taina Evans, Director, Specialty Clinics
Boys Town National Research Hospital
Dr. Harris Frankel, Senior VP, Chief Medical Officer
Nebraska Medicine
Beth Furlong, Associate Professor Emerita, Center for Health
Policy and Ethics, Creighton University
Russ Iwan, Water Supply Engineer, MUD
Dan Kirwan, COO, The Maids
Adam Kuenning, Attorney at Law, Erickson / Sederstrom
John Marshall, Principal & Shareholder, Professional Risk
Services, SilverStone Group
Rosenda Ovalle, Branch Manager, First National Bank
Scott Peters, Attorney (retired)
Terry Peterson, President, Omaha Track
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VNA is grateful for your service!



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