As a nurse, Susan Marcoux had spent most of her career providing care for others, and in recent years providing hospice care. But, when she was diagnosed with an aggressive form of brain cancer called glioblastoma multiforme, it was time for her to be the recipient of this kind of care.

A stroke alerted them to the issue and so began a journey for both Susan and her husband, Roger. “It’s a terrible beast that grows in your brain and you often don’t know until something bad happens – memory loss, physical impairment, horrible headaches,” Roger recalls. “Susan and I didn’t get the chance to talk about what we wanted to do and the aggressive nature of her illness progressed so quickly.”

Roger eventually turned to the VNA for help. “It’s astounding the support I received from the VNA,” he says. “I just wish I had sought support earlier, before she deteriorated so much.”

Like many others diagnosed with an end-stage disease, understanding when to access these services can be confusing. Hospice services provide high-quality care and support so families can focus on being together.

The VNA offers a range of services to help those who have a life-threatening or life-limiting illness maintain the highest quality of life possible from palliative services to community hospice in the home setting, or hospice care at the VNA Vermont Respite House. Susan did eventually receive VNA hospice care at home and then quickly transitioned to Respite House after she had a seizure that made it more challenging for Roger to care for her on his own.

“I’m thankful for the VNA. I didn’t know how to tell Susan we needed to go to Respite House. I was afraid. But, the hospice team helped me through it,” said Roger. “I was able to spend time with Susan and not worry so much about everything else.”

The VNA has a dedicated team of nurses, social workers, licensed nursing assistants, chaplains, grief counselors and volunteers all trained at end-of-life care. “The job of hospice services means spending time with the client and their families and caregivers to develop a plan of care that meets the client’s goals and wishes,” says Jina Cate, RN, Clinical Nurse Manager for VNA Hospice.

“Susan knew her cancer was not curable and she feared dying alone. What I could give her was my heart, mind and body to shield her as best I could,” Roger says. “Night after interminable night, I nestled by her side. I rarely left her side.”

Roger now attends free VNA bereavement group sessions facilitated by Bereavement Care Coordinator Ally Parker, and thanks all of the staff who cared for both his wife and him. “Susan was my soulmate and losing her was so tough. I wouldn’t be here without the level of support I received.”
THE SUN SHONE BRIGHTLY on the runners, walkers, bikers, dog walkers and hula hoopers at this year’s Vermont Respite House 5K Fun Run and Jiggety Jog. Thanks to our many participants and volunteers and our corporate and individual sponsors, over $64,000 was raised for Vermont Respite House, a home-away-from-home for people with terminal illness.

Alice Christian of Colchester was the top individual fundraiser with a grand total of $1,575. Team Irwin, led by Ann and Reed Irwin of Burlington with support from Cathy, Thomas and Monroe Shearer of Essex Junction, took home the award for top team fundraiser, raising $5,040.

Top running prizes went to (male) Michael Graziosi of Glastonbury, Conn, and (female) Camille Bolduc of South Burlington.

Want to see the results of the timed run or photos from the event? Visit vnacares.org/run for a link to the race results and a photo gallery.

VNA’s Madison-Deane Initiative invites you to a “Knowledge is Power” free event

Changing the Landscape of End-of-Life Care in Vermont: Strengthening the Patient-Physician Relationship

With Dr. Lauge Sokol-Hessner

Tuesday October 27, 2015, 7-8:30 pm, at DoubleTree Hotel by Hilton, Williston Road, South Burlington

RSVP at www.vnacares.org/mdi.

Conversations on end of life are getting increasing attention locally and nationally. In Vermont, we are embarking on change now to ensure our goals for end-of-life care are honored. Dr. Sokol-Hessner has successfully led systemic change at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center to support an improved experience for patients and physicians at the end of life. Based on his work, he will share a template for change that better supports individuals’ goals for care. The Madison-Deane Initiative hopes to empower community members and health care providers to engage in conversations about end of life care plans.

The Vermont Hospice Study findings will also be discussed during this event.

Dr. Sokol-Hessner is the Associate Director of Inpatient Quality and Conversation Ready Team Leader at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. He is also faculty for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement’s Conversation Ready Health Care Community.
New Digs for Adult Day Program

Visit any of VNA’s three Adult Day Programs and you’ll immediately be swept into the bustle of activity. On any given day, you might find the participants practicing tai chi or playing bingo, discussing current events or creatively writing a story together, making birdhouses or sharing a meal with friends.

The Adult Day programs are more than just a place to go during the day. “It’s the experience of coming together and being with friends,” says Francesca Creta-Merrill, Site Manager for the Grand Way site in South Burlington. “Our clients come to live, love and laugh. We’re a family.”

Our programs in Williston, South Burlington and Colchester offer a safe and home-like social setting for elders, adults with disabilities and persons with memory impairments, while also providing a respite and peace of mind for caregivers.

VNA has seen growth in this program in recent years, but this has also created a challenge for our site in Williston. “It has been a wonderful location, but there’s very little expansion space,” says Allyn Chase-Denton, Williston Site Manager. “We’ve run out of room to grow.”

VNA made the decision to find a new and bigger location not far away from where they are currently located. The search expanded to Essex where a new building was found. In the beginning of December the new site will open with more space for people in wheelchairs and opportunities for joint activities with a neighboring childcare program. And there will be space for more clients. Of the 40 available spaces, 10 are allotted for clients with memory impairment.

With a growing population of Vermonters over the age of 65, the prevalence of dementia is increasing as well. “Our memory care program in South Burlington has been very successful and we have found a need to grow our memory care program,” says Diane Olechna, Manager of the Adult Day program. “Adding space for persons with memory impairments in this new location was a logical next step.”

The building hosts a larger common area for everyone, but with a separate area for clients with dementia when there is a need for a quieter space away from everyone. Staff from all three sites have been receiving training through conferences and programs on person-centered care and caring for persons with dementia. “We continue to learn and grow in our understanding of how to work with someone with dementia,” says Francesca. “We put into practice the tools and techniques we have learned and we continue to take these courses to help reinforce the knowledge of what we already know.”

There is a lot of communication between the sites, too. “We meet a couple times a week and share information about what has worked in our programs,” says Donna LaFromboise-Perretta, Site Manager for the Colchester site. “And we stay in constant communication with family and caregivers so we’re all on the same page.”

A grand opening ceremony date will be announced in the next couple of weeks to allow our community to share in this new venture.
VNA Selected to Participate in Medicare Pilot

VNA and the other member agencies of the VNAs of Vermont have been selected by CMS to participate in the Medicare Care Choices Model. This pilot, which is being introduced in two phases, will allow these selected agencies to provide palliative care and care management services to patients who qualify for hospice care but still wish to receive curative care, such as chemotherapy. VNA has been selected for phase 1 of the pilot and will begin in January 2016.

“The Medicare Care Choices Model empowers clinicians and patients with choices. Specifically, clinicians, family members and caregivers in this model will no longer need to choose between hospice services and curative care,” says Patrick Conway, MD, deputy administrator for innovation and quality and CMS chief medical officer.

The goal of the program is to help patients and their families identify goals and develop a patient-centered care plan that will improve their quality of life and reduce overall medical costs.

“Improving the quality of life for those with a life-threatening or life-limiting illness is a priority for all of the VNAs of Vermont member agencies,” says Judy Peterson, VNA President and CEO. “This pilot will expand care options for people with advanced illness and help them live life to the fullest with comfort and dignity.”

A Job That Speaks to Your Heart

“THE EXTREME FLEXIBILITY is why I came to the VNA. I had young children at home, experience in child care and was looking for something meaningful,” recalls Christine Hale, Site Manager of the VNA Anderson Parkway Independent Living, a community house available for people ages 62 and younger with mobility impairments who choose to live independently. When Christine became a personal care attendant (PCA) at the VNA, she never imagined she’d one day be a site manager. “Once my kids started school, I was able to complete all three levels of PCA training and then enroll in the licensed nursing assistant (LNA) program at the VNA. I was able to do all this while still working as a PCA.” Christine also appreciated the opportunity to try out different jobs within the VNA until she found the right fit.

The VNA invests almost $100,000 each year in the Career Ladder training program available to our 250 PCAs and 60 LNAs. The Career Ladder is unique, offering an entry level position in the health care field while providing free training opportunities for people like Christine who otherwise might not have access. Training includes classroom work, hands-on lab time and shadowing of veteran PCAs in the field and in the office. “It is a program that is vital to our agency, as we always have a need for PCAs,” says Heidi Brodtman, PCA Educator II. “And we have been able to use our PCA ladder program to feed our LNA training program and thus fill the needs of our agency.”
Weekend of Hope

During the last weekend in May, fourteen families participated in our 18th ANNUAL CAMP KNOCK KNOCK, VNA’s annual family bereavement camp held at YMCA’s Camp Abnaki in North Hero. The rain held off during the weekend, allowing for a variety of activities, including recreational games, two parades, build-a-bear activities, hip-hop dancing, face painting, as well as the launching of our message-carrying balloon.

There were also small bereavement groups for children, teens and adults to discuss and process their individual losses and experience of grief. A special thanks to our many volunteers who supported the families and helped camp run smoothly and to Burlington Taiko Drummers and Murph, the Physical Comedian, for providing entertainment.

Camp began as a collaborative effort between the Junior League of the Champlain Valley and the VNA’s End-of-Life Care Services. The camp is able to be held every year, thanks to financial support from local organizations, community donations and the support of our many volunteers who help with all aspects of camp.

Patty Gratton has been promoted to Finance and Accounting Supervisor in our Finance and Operations Department. “She is a valuable member of our team and has a willingness to do what is necessary to get the job done,” says Jim Manahan, VP of Finance and Administration. She takes over for David Hedelund, who after 17 years of dedicated service to the VNA, recently retired.

This summer, in addition to a slew of fun summer activities, the VNA Family Room featured a storytelling presentation as part of a grant from the Children’s Literacy Foundation (CLiF). CLiF awards Summer Readers grants to organizations serving kids at high risk of experiencing a “summer slide” in literacy skills. Research shows that children who don’t read over summer vacation tend to lose literacy skills while children who do read improve their reading abilities. A special thanks to CLiF for this opportunity which also gave the children at the presentation the opportunity to select two new books each out of hundreds of titles available.

Our VNA website (www.vnacares.org) will have a new look and feel this fall. Our goal is to streamline the information on our site to ultimately provide a better customer experience, and update the features on our site, such as mobile viewing and online donations, to better meet the needs of our current and prospective clients, volunteers, staff, donors and friends. We invite you to pay us a visit!

VNA is extremely thankful for the dedication of our Hospice volunteers. More than 270 volunteers provided 11,210 hours of free service last year, including companionship, respite for families, music with Noyana Singers, support to our staff at Vermont Respite House, and in many other ways. This spring we honored volunteers who have reached milestone anniversaries at an annual Hospice Volunteer recognition dinner. Jennifer Larsen and Diane Irish were added into our Volunteer Quarter Century club for their 25 years of service. Pamela MacPherson was honored for her 30 years as a volunteer and Lillian Venner and Charlotte Kenney were recognized for their 35 years.

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November 12, 2015
Hampton Inn, Colchester
5:45 - 9 pm

We’ll gather at the Hampton Inn near Costco in Colchester to honor staff and volunteers who have reached milestone anniversaries. We’ll also honor community friends and hear from our CEO Judy Peterson. Please call 802-860-4435 for more info.

Annual Staff and Volunteer Recognition Dinner
Join us for our annual Staff and Volunteer Recognition Dinner on November 12, 2015, at the Hampton Inn in Colchester. We’ll gather at the Hampton Inn near Costco in Colchester to honor staff and volunteers who have reached milestone anniversaries. We’ll also honor community friends and hear from our CEO Judy Peterson. Please call 802-860-4435 for more info.

Please visit www.vnacares.org for more information about VNA activities.

VNA Calendar