



News from
the Natick
Visiting
Nurse
Association

Healthy at Home

Summer 2015

Support Massachusetts Seniors & Their Family Caregivers

Over 1.2 million Bay State residents are caring for an aging parent or loved one, helping them to live independently in their own homes. These family caregivers have a huge responsibility, and we can take some common sense steps that would make the world of difference to them. That's why AARP urges lawmakers to enact The Caregiver Advise, Record, Enable (CARE) Act to better support family caregivers as they safely help Massachusetts seniors stay at home.

What is The CARE Act? The CARE Act recognizes the critical role family caregivers play in keeping their loved ones out of costly institutions. The bill features three important provisions:

- The name of the family caregiver is recorded when a loved one is admitted into a hospital;
- The family caregiver is notified if the loved one is to be discharged to another facility or back home; and
- The facility must provide an explanation and live instruction of the medical tasks – such as medication management, injections, wound care, and transfers – that the family caregiver will perform at home.

Why Massachusetts Needs The CARE Act:

- Most care recipients (69%) did not have a home visit by a health care professional after discharge from the hospital.
- Almost half (46%) of family caregivers perform medical or nursing tasks for their loved ones with multiple chronic physical and cognitive conditions.
- Three out of four (78%) who provide these medical or nursing tasks manage medications, including administering intravenous fluids and injections. Most family caregivers report that they received little or no training to perform these tasks.

"Supporting family caregivers, who provide unpaid care at home, helps keep their loved ones out of more expensive institutional care," said Mike Festa, AARP MA state director.

To ask your legislator to support the bill (HB 2081), call 617-722-2000 or go to mass.gov/legis.

Source: AARP Massachusetts



In this Issue

- Neighbors Caring for Neighbors 1
- Let Me Tell You About... from the CEO 2
- You're In the Loop: Happenings & Events 3
- Healthy Habits 3
- You Make a Difference 4

Neighbors caring for neighbors

Meredith was introduced to Natick VNA when she was in high school. Her dad had a stroke that changed his mobility dramatically. Natick VNA was there, in her family's home, helping him.

A decade later, when her mother became ill with her first major episode of MS, "Natick VNA became a big part of our game plan," she said. "My mother had relapsing remitting MS, which meant she would have an attack and then go into a sort of remission. MS affects different people in different ways. An 'attack' for my mother meant that she would lose muscle control in her arms and legs."

During these episodes, Meredith's mother, Harriet, was treated in the hospital with steroids in order to shrink the swelling in her spinal cord. She would then go into rehab and subsequently return home. "It was a cycle for many years, and we never knew when the cycle would begin again," Meredith says. And each time there was an episode she would get better but, "she never made it back to 100 percent."

Although Meredith and her sister lived nearby and helped significantly with their mother's care, they weren't able to be there every day. "My mother's home health aides were with her regularly. They made sure she was showered, had meals and clean laundry, and pretty much anything else she needed. They were our extra eyes," Meredith says.

Meredith added that her mother, who was also diabetic, was cared for very well by her nursing

staff. They checked on her medical needs regularly as her disease progressed, and her interactions with the home health aides, nurses and therapists were "absolutely necessary," Meredith says, in keeping her home for as long as possible.

"Just the socialization factor alone was so important to my mother. She had people visiting her when my sister and I were working. We always heard about the people from Natick VNA who became such a big part of her life," says Meredith. "We're so appreciative of everything they did. It was a hard period of time, but it was really important that they were there. They became friends to my mother. They were great."

Meredith added that the Natick VNA team was an integral part of the family's support network that they could not have done without.

"The main thing they did was allow her to stay home longer, which was absolutely what she wanted."



Let Me Tell You About...

The Affordable Care Act introduced measures to assist consumers in making informed decisions about their health care providers, based on an agency's performance.



The agency performance data, which measures the quality of in-home care patients receive, was recently published on Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' (CMS) Home Health Compare website. In an effort to make this data more consumer-friendly, a group of these measures has been reported using a star rating system for the first time ever.

Natick VNA earned a five-star rating, the highest rating available, which places our agency among the top three percent of Medicare-certified home health agencies nationwide. We met or surpassed both Massachusetts' and national averages for quality outcomes. Natick VNA is the only agency in MetroWest – and one of four in Massachusetts – to achieve this status.

The ratings are based on both process measures and quality measures, some of which include the following:

- Timely initiation of care
- Drug education on medications provided to patient/caregiver
- Flu immunization for the current season
- Improvement in pain that interferes with activity

While we, at Natick VNA, know that our clinicians provide unparalleled care to our patients and their families, these Home Health Compare numbers validate that for us.

I hope you'll take a look at the Home Health Compare website (available via www.cms.gov) to see how Natick VNA measures up against other VNAs here, in Massachusetts, and across the country.

Judith Boyko, RN, MS, MBA

You're in the Loop Happenings and Events



FRESH TASTE

An evening to benefit Natick VNA

Showcasing regional chefs and
fresh ingredients

October 1, 2015
6pm–9pm

Elm Bank Reservation
Wellesley, Mass.

Featuring WCVB reporter
Kelley Tuthill

www.FreshTasteNVNA.org
508-653-3081

Q1 2015 grants report

Thank you to the following organizations for their ongoing support of our programs and services:

- **MetroWest Health Foundation**—a \$109,000 grant to support MetroWest Meds
- **Massachusetts Medical Society and Alliance Charitable Foundation**—a \$10,000 grant to support MetroWest Meds' Pharmacy Card program
- **TJX Foundation**— a \$5,000 grant to support our telehealth program
- **Wellesley Hills Junior Women's Club**— \$1,000 to offset the cost of unreimbursed care for patients in Wellesley
- **Rotary Club of Natick**— \$750 to be used to educate clinicians in Reiki II

Natick VNA Clinicians Complete Habilitation Therapy Training in Alzheimer's Disease

Twenty-five clinicians have completed the Alzheimer's Association Habilitation Therapy training to further their knowledgebase in caring for patients who suffer from Alzheimer's disease.

Completion of the training enables them to recognize, identify and care for individuals who have Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia. The training was made possible through a grant awarded to Natick VNA.

Judith Boyko, RN, MS, MBA says that specialty training and clinician certifications are an important part of the agency's plan to continue providing award-winning care for patients with specific conditions.

"As the number of people with Alzheimer's disease increases, we are preparing our clinicians to provide the most appropriate care to patients with this degenerative condition. We also want our patients – both current and future - and their families to have the peace of mind knowing that they and their loved ones are receiving care from clinicians who are armed with the latest knowledge based on research," said Boyko.



Several members of the Natick VNA clinical team hold certificates of completion for the Alzheimer's Association Habilitation Therapy training.

Healthy Habits...It's YOUR Choice

If you've ever been a hospital patient for illness, injury or surgery, you may have been discharged with VNA services.

But did you know that you have a choice when it comes to your VNA provider? Many are unaware that the term "VNA," which stands for "Visiting Nurse Association," does not refer to a national agency or association with local chapters. VNA refers to the type of organization; not the company itself.

The very first VNA was established in New York in the late 1800s to provide free nursing care to those who were unable to afford or access it. The Visiting Nurse Association of America says that the growing immigrant population at that time created a need for other VNAs to care for people in their geographic regions.

Natick VNA was established in 1899 to serve the town of Natick. Today, 116 years later, Natick VNA serves 21 towns throughout MetroWest – a geography that overlaps that of other area VNAs.

So, how does one go about choosing a VNA provider? Just ask.

As Americans, it is our right to choose our post-acute care provider. Under the law, Medicare requires that when patients are discharged with home health care, they are informed of the providers that can deliver it.

Hospitals and medical facilities are obligated to provide the patient or the patient's family a list of those agencies so the patient may make an informed decision. Finally, the law says that a hospital or medical facility also must disclose any financial interest it has in the agency to which it is referring.

In its "Your Care, Your Choice," the Home Care Alliance of Massachusetts says that "any facility that fails to explain this completely, or that otherwise seeks to limit patient choice in providers, risks sanction and losing its Medicare billing privileges." (VNA services are reimbursed by Medicare, Medicaid, HMOs and other private insurers.)

Some might say that they would opt to utilize the provider their physician sends them home with to ease the transition and to keep the same clinicians as well as their medical records in one place. Or, because they don't feel confident enough to speak up. But, the fact is this: You. Have. A. Choice. It's the law.

But where to begin? Look for some of the following when choosing a VNA:

--Medicare's Home Health Compare data outlines how well agencies care for their patients; how often they use best practices for patients and "whether patients improved in certain important areas of care;" and what other patients say about the agencies.

--CHAP accreditation indicates that an agency meets the highest standards of home care accreditation.

--A HomeCare Elite agency has been recognized for a variety of care standards among nearly 10,000 peer agencies across the country.

If you've been under the care of a VNA and you were happy with that care, ask for that agency next time you return home with post-acute services. You won't hurt anyone's feelings, and your records will be sent to the appropriate place. You don't have to worry about a thing. Except your healing, of course.

In their words...

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you," she said, grasping my hand. Her eyes welled up with tears. "If it wasn't for the Natick VNA, I don't know what we would have done for my parents. Both of them."

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Your generosity assists us in providing quality home health care to many MetroWest residents who are sick, disabled and terminally ill and who lack the financial resources to pay for care.

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