



## BARBARA TALBERT: A SURVIVOR'S STORY

At 76 years old, Barbara is a four-time cancer survivor. She and her husband Terry were both born and raised in New Hampshire, have been married for 57 years, and have two grown sons. "I didn't think I had the coronavirus, I thought that my symptoms were from the chemo treatments."

After five days in the hospital with a temperature, low blood pressure, low blood count, low heart rate, and severe diarrhea, Barbara was ready to go home.

"I think they wanted me to stay longer, but I said no, I want to go home." That's when VNH's RN Case Manager Stephanie Duquette stepped in to provide home care services and get

*(Read more on page 4)*

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## A MESSAGE FROM JOHANNA

Crisis, perseverance, adapting to change, this has been our world for the last several months.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way we all live, work, and play. At VNH, we launched incident command as soon as COVID-19 became a known threat to our community and operations. The team went to work on setting new policies and procedures for working remotely and to continue providing necessary home-based services to our patients.



Following federal, state and expert guidance, we adapted administrative and clinical work to ensure the safety of our staff and those we serve. We were able to replace traditional in-person visits with telehealth for many of our patients and continue to offer this service as needed. With temporary changes to Medicare and state requirements, we were able to provide services to many who would not traditionally be eligible for home health services. We gladly accepted these referrals, allowing people to stay safe at home and receive necessary nursing and therapy services. Fortunately, with the success of the region in curbing the spread of COVID-19 and with the support of the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health system and other partners, we are back to “normal” business. Our normal now includes face coverings, social distancing, masks and face shields for direct care staff – every person, every day.



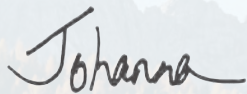
We are dedicated to delivering outstanding home health and hospice services and this crisis is no exception. We have been challenged to think of innovative ways to deliver care to our patients, where they want to be and where they are safest – at home. This newsletter highlights the remarkable work done by our staff, volunteers, and community members during these unprecedented times.

As we look to our future, we are planning for care delivery in a world that continues to include the coronavirus. We're prepared, we've been prepared, and we'll continue to adapt as needed to meet the needs of our community, health system, and healthcare partners.

I am proud of the work the VNH team has accomplished, and I am grateful for the ongoing support of the community which allows us to provide these essential services.

Together, even from a distance, we are making a difference and I thank you for your partnership.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Johanna'.

Johanna L. Beliveau, BSN, MBA, RN  
President and Chief Executive Officer

# COORDINATION IN CRISES: VNH INCIDENT COMMAND

**Working in healthcare during a global pandemic is something that no one had encountered or planned on. While the leadership team at VNH did not have a specific plan for the COVID-19 pandemic, we were ready to lead through the challenges in the most effective way.**

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) requires healthcare organizations to create and put in place an Emergency Preparedness plan. Having a plan in place prepares organizations to continue operations during sudden disruptive events. Events such as severe weather, road and power outages, and infectious disease outbreaks. VNH's comprehensive Emergency Preparedness plan proved to be helpful during the pandemic.

In early March, the VNH leadership team began to prepare for the possible impact the COVID-19 virus could have. Because it was still unknown

what the impact would be, the administrative and clinical leaders walked through potential scenarios to draft plans on how the agency would respond and continue to serve patients if the threat became a reality. A couple weeks later COVID-19 became a reality in our region and VNH launched Incident Command to lead through the ever-changing landscape of healthcare delivery.

The next six weeks, administrative and clinical leaders met almost every day. They discussed new information, new policies and procedures, and the best way to serve the community while keeping both staff and patients safe. By setting up Incident Command, VNH was able to respond and work in a coordinated and organized approach.

While many organizations closed their doors, VNH continued to see patients virtually or in their home. We are proud of our employees and how they adapted to the changing and uncertain environment. They learned how to work from home, use new technology, and care for patients while wearing more and different protective equipment and rose to the challenge to serve our patients when they needed us most.

## Staying Safe in Your Home DURING COVID-19

Protect yourself and your family by following these general precautions:



### **Wash your hands frequently.**

Scrub your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Need a timer? Hum the "Happy Birthday" song from beginning to end twice. If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



### **Cover coughs and sneezes.**

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.

If you are sick, you should wear a facemask when you are around other people.



### **Clean all surfaces in your home that are touched often.**



### **Call your health care provider's office in advance of a visit.**



### **Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.**



### **Stay home if you're sick.**

Limit movement in your community and stay home when you are sick.



### **Practice social distancing.**

Remain at least 6 feet away from others.



Jennifer Kiser,  
DPT, joined VNH  
in April 2017.

# I am vnh

**Jennifer Kiser, DPT**  
joined VNH in April 2017.

## What is the best part about your job?

It's rewarding to see patients achieve personal goals, whether it's to improve walking, decrease pain, increase strength/balance, or breathe easier. I know each day I make a difference in some small way. I can't see myself doing anything else.

## What have you learned during the pandemic?

In times of uncertainty, we surprise ourselves at what we can do. We will get through this, and be better clinicians for navigating this challenge. The kindness and support of my team gives me confidence we can succeed. We are resilient and adaptable and will always meet the needs of our patients.

## What would you like to tell your patients?

We were here for you before, we are here for you now, and we will be, always. You might not recognize us under our PPE, but we're still the same encouraging and compassionate caregivers you have always known! The situation is unsettling, but we are in this together. We are caregivers at heart, nothing can change that!

## A SURVIVOR'S STORY *(Continued from cover)*

Barbara on the road to recovery. Once she was home, she saw much improvement. She was sleeping and eating more regularly, and was feeling better overall.

Barbara believes she contracted the virus from Terry, who may have picked it up while out running errands. COVID-19 presented itself differently for Terry. He experienced excruciating pain throughout his entire body – from his head to his toes – and couldn't maneuver for about five days.

"With COVID-19, we are learning something new daily," said Stephanie Duquette, RN Case Manager at VNH, "Due to Barbara's compromised immune system, I would have expected COVID-19 would have taken a serious toll on her, but that wasn't the case." Stephanie went on to explain that she has not met two people that have presented symptoms that are exactly the same. "The list of possible symptoms is getting bigger and bigger!"

During the time Barbara received services from VNH she

lost 25 pounds and still doesn't have much of an appetite, but she is getting stronger every day. Although she is free of coronavirus symptoms, she continues her battle with cancer.

"Some days I sit on the porch and say to my husband, 'I don't know if I can do this anymore, honey,' and he says, 'Yes you can,' so I kind of think I can."

For Barbara, the hardest part about living through the pandemic has been the boredom and not knowing what to do while cooped up at home. "During this time, it is hard not to see anyone," she said. "Trying to un-socialize because I couldn't socialize, that was tough." Even now that she is no longer battling COVID-19, she hesitates to go out in fear of exposing herself to something else.

The connection Stephanie and Barbara built during Barbara's time on service with VNH was unmistakable. "You people have been wonderful!" Barbara exclaimed when recounting her experience with VNH. She gazed across the table at Stephanie and said, "Stephanie is great; you are lucky to have her."



# TWINS BORN DURING COVID-19



Reflection from VNH's  
Kim Rowntree, Strong  
Families Vermont  
Nurse Home Visitor

I met Audrey\* roughly a month before her due date. She is almost 30 and lives in a farmhouse with her dog and a housemate. Audrey has a complex relationship with the father of the babies, who will not be with her at the birth of their twin girls.

Audrey had arranged for her aunt to be with her for her planned C-section, scheduled

for mid-March, just as travel restrictions were being put in place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her aunt, who is elderly and lives two states away, was unable to be with Audrey for the birth due to the possibility of getting COVID-19. When Audrey shared this news with me, I contacted my supervisor to ask whether it would be appropriate for me to offer to be at the birth under these unusual circumstances. My supervisor agreed that it was very important to support Audrey at this important time in her life. It was an honor to be present for the birth of Audrey's two beautiful girls. Audrey was able to hold each of the girls for a short while before they transferred her to

her own room, at which point Audrey asked that I accompany the babies to the nursery, which I did. After Audrey was settled in her room, the nurse and I wheeled the babies to the room and Audrey wanted to immediately put them to breast. I was happy to be able to help with this and amazed at Audrey's motivation to do tandem nursing that first day! I made sure to give Audrey lots of positive feedback about her natural instincts as a mom since she was lacking support from family and friends at this vulnerable time. I thought it was important to let her know she was doing an amazing job with them and was clearly bonding with her babies right from the start.

## STRONG FAMILIES Vermont

Strong Families Vermont Nurse Home Visiting Program supports healthy decision making and effective parenting throughout the joys and challenges of being a parent. This program supports the foundation of a healthy family through:

- A reliable nurse at no cost to the family to visit regularly during pregnancy, after birth, and continuing through the child's second birthday.
- A voluntary, structured program to support the parenting journey.
- Nursing visits to take place at the home or another place where everyone is comfortable.

As our program was in the process of shifting from in person visits to phone visits, I had the time to continue to visit Audrey each day in the hospital, which felt important as I was counted as one of her two visitors related to the COVID-19 hospital policy at the time. I have confidence that Audrey will be able to get through this challenging start to life with her twins and meet many other goals while in the Strong Families Maternal Early Childhood Sustained Home-Visiting program.

*\*Name has been changed to protect the client's identity.*

## STUDENTS SHARE ART WITH HOSPICE PATIENTS

Students at the Ottauquechee School and the Waldorf School in Quechee, Vermont took the time to create artwork to send to our hospice patients in assisted living facilities. This beautiful artwork

brightened the day of many during a time when friends, family, and other visitors were not allowed. One patient wrote, "The children's greetings are lovely! I shall treasure them – and I'm smiling!"



# NEW LEADERSHIP & BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEMBER JOIN VNH AMIDST PANDEMIC

**Q: What was the on-boarding process like during COVID-19?**



**Ericka Bergeron**

**Ericka:** I started at VNH knowing little about homecare and VNH. Orienting to a new position and organization from home

presented some challenges. On-boarding materials were complete and extensive, but I missed the in-person interactions and felt disconnected at times. There were benefits to the virtual platform though, as I did meet 70 people in a matter of 10 days. I do not believe I would have been able to meet so many people quickly otherwise. Some personalization

was missing, but it did allow us to be more present even if it was from afar.

**Q: What has it been like leading new teams during the pandemic?**

**Ericka:** Ever-changing. The pandemic has given us the opportunity to walk the walk and talk the talk. The managers and I are going out in the field and spending entire days side by side with our clinicians and reassuring them we are right there with them. Being present for them is important.

**Q: This has been a challenging time. How have your teams responded?**

**Ericka:** They took it seriously from the beginning and were role

models for the community on how to respond to this pandemic. At VNH, we encouraged staff to wear masks in public even before Vermont and New Hampshire did. We used our teams as champions and empowered them to share the impact that they have on and off the clock.

**Q: During this time, what has your perspective of VNH been?**

**Ericka:** It has been such a culture change for me. VNH is such a different place to work and it has been wonderful so far. One thing that I appreciate is, even though we are in the middle of a pandemic, the expectation is not to be on email at 10 p.m. To work in an organization that values and encourages work-life balance is great.

*Catherine Ells, Paul Handley, Katherine Milligan, Rebecca O'Berry, and Kathleen Vasconcelos joined the VNH Board of Trustees in July. All five of our newest Board members embody the spirit of community and bring an immense amount of talent, expertise, and energy to the table.*

## **Catherine Ells, MBA**

is Vice President/Controller at Mascoma Bank in Lebanon, New Hampshire.



## **Katherine Milligan, PhD, MBA**

is Program Director of the Master of Health Care Delivery Science at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire.



## **Kathleen Vasconcelos, MS**

is Executive Director at Grafton County Senior Citizens Council, Inc. in Lebanon, New Hampshire.



## **Paul Handley, MBA**

was most recently a Global Operations Controller at Analog Devices Inc. in Norwood, Massachusetts.



**Rebecca O'Berry, MHA** is Vice President of Operations at Gifford Health Care in Randolph, Vermont.



Our sincerest and grateful appreciation to **Dana Michalovic** and **Gary Mayo** for their dedicated service to VNH, as they stepped down from the board in July.

**For more info and a full list of Leadership and Board of Trustees members, visit [vnhcare.org/leadership](https://vnhcare.org/leadership).**

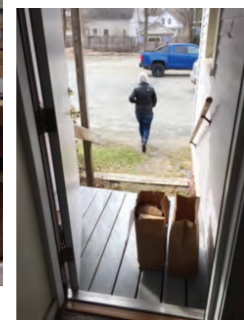
# VOLUNTEERS IN ACTION



The area that Visiting Nurse and Hospice for Vermont and New Hampshire serves is unique. Spanning over 140 towns in Vermont and New Hampshire, many strong connections exist between the neighboring state communities. This connection shined during the COVID-19 pandemic. VNH's 40 trained volunteers still took time to give selflessly to help people live as fully as possible, even at the end of life.



When our volunteers were unable to visit patients and their families in the home, they found other ways to assist. They made phone calls to patients and sent handwritten cards and letters. They arranged food deliveries and secured other needed resources. Three members of one hospice patient's care team, with the goal of bringing the patient's confined life some joy and beauty, volunteered their time. They



planted and potted flowers outside of her home for her to admire while sitting in her favorite chair on her enclosed porch.

Nothing was going to get in the way of our dedicated volunteers, not even a global pandemic. Our community is a better, more compassionate place because of their service.

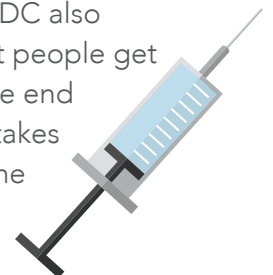
## FLU VACCINATION: MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

Flu season is going to quickly be upon us and it is clear that COVID-19 will still be a factor this season. While it may seem like there is much out of our control during the pandemic getting a flu shot, practicing proper hand hygiene, social distancing, and wearing face coverings are within our control. Doing these will help protect not only you but also your family and the community. Preventing the flu can save lives and preserve health care resources.

**VNH will be hosting several flu clinics in support of the community. Please stay tuned for more information.**

**Visit  
[vnhcare.org/calendar](https://www.vnhcare.org/calendar)  
for updates.**

The flu shot remains the best way to prevent the flu and related complications. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone six months or older get a flu shot every year. The CDC also recommends that people get it no later than the end of October, as it takes a few weeks for the shot to become fully protective.





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### Donate:

Online at [vnhcare.org](http://vnhcare.org) or mail check to:  
PO Box 881, Brattleboro, VT 05302

### Volunteer:

Visit [vnhcare.org](http://vnhcare.org)

Connect through our website:

[www.vnhcare.org](http://www.vnhcare.org)



## GO PAPERLESS!

Visit [vnhcare.org/news](http://vnhcare.org/news) to sign up to receive the VNH Connect electronically.



*Make a Difference*  
for your neighbors and  
fellow community members  
**with a career at VNH.**

Practice in a community setting where you're mobile and on the go, where teamwork and coordination are at the heart of what you do, and where we are COVID prepared!

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