

four children. They ran a kosher meat store for most of their married lives, until 1990, when the business was sold to Price Chopper. Myer passed away 10 years ago, and Ethel continued living in their home in Albany. This spring, she had hip replacement surgery, followed by rehabilitation at a local facility. But Ethel was adamant about returning home, and getting the therapy she needed where she was most comfortable. When the staff suggested she contact the VNA for home care, she was delighted.

And so, 71 years after her first invaluable experience with the VNA, Ethel found herself once again in our capable hands. For more than a month, she received home visits from an occupational therapist and a physical therapist, who helped her regain the strength and flexibility she needed to walk and be self-sufficient again. The therapists worked to increase Ethel's range of motion, developed an exercise program for her, and helped modify the layout of her home



Myer and Ethel Kagan

to improve independence and safety. Ethel was impressed not just with the skills of the VNA staff, but also how kind and compassionate they were. She now can continue living in the place she has called home for 54 years.

The Kagan family now includes 10 grandchildren and 17 great-children, whose photographs cover every wall and surface area. Ethel is incredibly proud of all of them. At age 90, Ethel still has a joyous enthusiasm for life. She looks forward to spending time with her cherished family, swimming at the local community center, and chatting with her friends. We hope that she won't need us again, but if she does, Ethel knows exactly who to call.

## A Woman of Distinction



Assemblywoman Woerner, Juliana, and Megan

On May 1, Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner held the first annual Women of Distinction Awards ceremony to honor local women who have made a positive impact on their communities. Twelve women received awards in several categories, including VNA nurse Megan Scaccia, who won an award in the Healthcare category.

Not only was Megan honored to receive an award, but she was especially proud because her 11-year-old daughter, Juliana, is the one who nominated her. When Juliana saw a poster at school requesting essays about people who make a difference in the community, she immediately decided to write about her mother. Her essay was chosen by Assemblywoman Woerner from more than 300 entries. Megan says that she loves what she does, and does not expect any special recognition, but "to be nominated by my own daughter is the greatest gift ever."

At the awards ceremony, Megan and Juliana were thrilled to meet Assemblywoman Woerner and Saratoga Mayor Joanne Yepsen. But for Megan, the highlight of the evening was sharing it with Juliana.

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## MEASURING THE QUALITY OF OUR WORK

We may all have a different understanding of what the word "quality" means. According to the dictionary, quality refers to a high grade of superiority or excellence. When it comes to healthcare, patients have an expectation that their provider will meet or exceed their perception of quality care. For certified home health agencies, meeting quality expectations is much more complex.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has instituted strict definitions, along with rigorous collection and reporting requirements for home care. CMS defines quality as having specific properties or domains, including efficiency, effectiveness, equity, timeliness, patient centeredness, and safety.

Since 1999, CMS has required Medicare-certified home health agencies like VNA Home Health to collect and transmit data for all adult patients whose care is reimbursed by Medicare and Medicaid (except for those receiving pre- or post-natal services.) This data is then provided to the agencies to help them guide quality and performance improvement efforts. Through CMS benchmarking, the VNA can compare its performance against state and national measurements. With the



increasing utilization of home care over hospital care for those recovering from surgery or a chronic medical condition, the CMS reporting mandate is important for patients and providers.

VNA Home Health has an ongoing Quality Assessment and Performance Improvement (QAPI) process to evaluate patient outcomes and develop plans to continually exceed performance outcome goals. The QAPI team examines patient outcome data from CMS and our agency records to provide a continuous, proactive study of the agency's performance. Our goal is to ensure that specific quality measures improve, and to develop guidelines and plans that will promote ongoing improvement.

For example, one of the CMS quality performance indicators compares the rate at which a home healthcare agency's

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## FROM OUR CEO

### Dear Friends,

If this issue of *VNA Community* can be said to have a theme, it is this: our commitment to providing quality health-care to our patients. From Mrs. Kagan, the delightful lady who kept her “motherhood” certificate for 71 years, to our Board president’s focus on achieving performance benchmarks, to an article explaining state and federal quality measurements, the pursuit of quality care is central to all of us at the VNA.

I’m very proud of our achievements and the quality initiatives we have undertaken, but I know we can always do better. That’s why VNA Home Health has ensured that all staff are involved in a collaborative, cross-departmental, and interdisciplinary approach to improving performance. There is no one “Quality” department – providing outstanding quality is everyone’s job, from office staff to clinical staff.

I have always held enormous respect for Florence Nightingale. In addition to being a pioneer of modern nursing, Ms. Nightingale may also have been a pioneer in quality improvement. After gaining infamy for her devoted service in the Crimean War, Ms. Nightingale dedicated her life to improving health care. She established one of Great Britain’s first nursing schools, became an expert on public sanitation issues, and wrote a book about hospital administration.

Ms. Nightingale’s example may seem daunting, but I can promise you that we will continue to ensure that performance improvement efforts are a priority. The loyalty shown by our patients speaks volumes about the results of those efforts.

**Susan Larman**  
Chief Executive Officer



## VNA COMMUNITY

A quarterly publication of  
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### Quality Assurance *continued from cover*

patients get a flu shot for the current flu season, as well as receiving a pneumonia vaccine. VNA Home Health scored above the state average for both these measures. Still, guidelines were put into place to improve the number of patients receiving these critical vaccines for the coming season. The VNA also scored above the state and national average for the rate at which our providers checked patients for the risk of developing bed sores and the frequency with which they included treatments to prevent bed sores in the plan of care.

VNA Home Health also scored above the state average in several other quality measures, such as improvement in ambulation, management of oral medications, improvement in the control of pain, and drug education efforts. We are especially pleased to have rated above the state benchmark in the “overall rating of care” measure, which indicates a high degree of patient satisfaction.

For VNA Home Health, maintaining an ongoing agency-wide program for quality improvement and patient safety is integral to our mission – providing the best possible healthcare in the most professional, appropriate and compassionate manner. 🌐

## Board Profile: Anthony Durante

After three years as a well-respected member of VNA Home Health’s Board of Directors, Anthony Durante was elected Board President in May. It’s a natural fit for Durante, who has served as Chief Financial Officer as well as one of the owners of Capital Living and Rehabilitation Centers in Schenectady since 2004. His position at Capital Living gives him a unique perspective on the integral partnership between rehabilitation facilities and home healthcare agencies like VNA Home Health.

The primary challenges he faces as CFO, Durante said, are navigating the constantly changing healthcare landscape, and dealing with shrinking Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement, while ensuring the patients are receiving the best quality care. He recognizes that many of these challenges are also relevant to his role as President of the Board.

The Board’s primary function, as Durante sees it, is to support the agency and its mission while making good business decisions. While they have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the VNA follows legal and ethical standards, they also have a role in ensuring that the agency meets federal and state benchmarks concerning quality and performance improvement. It can be a difficult balancing act, but Durante’s years working in the healthcare field have prepared him to confidently lead VNA Home Health into the future.

Mr. Durante grew up in the Capital Region, and attended college at the University of Miami. He remained in South Florida for 12



Anthony and his son James

more years, working as a CPA and auditor, before returning to the area in 2004 to join Capital Living. Away from his job and volunteer activities with the VNA Board, Durante is a self-described “sports nut,” and loves to take advantage of the warm weather months by getting out to play golf. He especially enjoys coaching his son, James’, little league and basketball teams. Durante is also on the board of directors at The Boys and Girls Club of Schenectady. 🌐

## Nurses Week Celebrated at the VNA

National Nurses Week, which begins on May 6 and ends May 12 (Florence Nightingale’s birthday), is an annual celebration that gives recognition to nurses and their role in society. The week also serves to raise awareness about nursing as a meaningful career choice.



Florence Nightingale, who lived from 1820 to 1910, is considered to be the founder of professional nursing. She is revered for her fearless advocacy for healthcare and social reforms throughout her lifetime.

For VNA Home Health, Nurses Week is an opportunity to give recognition to our dedicated nurses, and to acknowledge the critical role that all our employees play in the VNA’s continued success. We celebrated with breakfast for the entire staff on May 10. CEO Susan Larman gave a presentation on the life of Florence Nightingale, fun prizes were given out, and employees competed in a nursing trivia contest.

Although National Nurses Week comes only once annually, sincere gratitude is due throughout the year to those who dedicate their lives to the nursing profession. 🌐

## Ethel Kagan’s Wonderful Life

Anyone who has received care from a VNA provider will invariably turn to us again when in need. For Mrs. Ethel Kagan, the gap in time between her first experience with the VNA and her next was 71 years! But some things never change – Ethel says that in both instances, she received exemplary care.

In 1945, Ethel was just nineteen, living with her mother in Albany while her husband, Myer, served overseas. She and Myer were high school sweethearts, marrying as soon as Ethel graduated at age 17. The couple moved around the country for a few years while Myer took classes through the Army, but when he was sent overseas, the newly-pregnant Ethel stayed behind in Albany. That’s when the Visiting Nurse Association of Albany stepped in. For several weeks, a nurse came to the house and taught Ethel everything she needed to know to care for her baby. For the nervous young bride, the classes were a blessing. When her instruction was completed, she received a framed certificate



that she kept as a treasured memento. The certificate, dated August 15, 1945, states that “Mrs. Ethel Kagan has completed the Classes in Motherhood,” and is adorned with a gold seal trimmed with blue and pink ribbon. Her daughter, Barbara, was born that September.

After the war, Ethel and Myer settled in Albany, where their family grew to include

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