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## **VNA of Central Jersey Nurse Visits Capitol Hill; Testifies at Congressional Hearing on Importance of Medicare Home Health Benefit**

*Representing New Jersey, VNACJ nurse urges lawmakers to Oppose Proposed Cuts to Medicare Home Health*

Red Bank, NJ, May 28, 2009 – VNA of Central Jersey Nurse Kim Pahira was recently selected by the National Association of Home Care (NAHC) to travel to Capitol Hill and testify before a Congressional Panel in opposition to the proposed \$13 billion in cuts to the Medicare Home Health benefit. Ms. Pahira spoke at a hearing of the Congressional Home Care Caucus in Washington on May 13th, joining in the fight to preserve access to home care and hospice services on behalf of her patients – and all Americans.

“I traveled to Washington to convey how important the Medicare home health benefit is to the patients I care for, and the agency I work for,” said Pahira. “While we all recognize the economic challenges before us, I told Congress that cuts to home care is just the wrong place to look for savings.”

“The cuts currently being considered will jeopardize the ability of agencies like ours from providing the access to care that we provide today to all patients, and jeopardize the ability of seniors to choose home care. This program works for Central Jersey residents, and should be embraced.”

Pahira told the Congressional panel the story of her patient who is a quadriplegic as a result of multiple sclerosis, and was forced to retire from work in 1996 at age 40. In 2004, he went in to a coma as a result of multiple infections, and when he came out of the coma, he couldn't move his arms or legs. As a quadriplegic, he can only move his head.

“The patient I spoke of at the hearing is an amazing man, someone who represents the face of Medicare home health in many ways,” said Pahira. “It is my responsibility to visit him at home and to supervise the physician-ordered personal care he receives. The potential problems I address keep him out of the hospital and at home, where he wants to be.”



Pahira was one of 50 nurses -- one from each state -- who brought stories and photos of their patients and who were not able to represent themselves in Washington. The nurses described the ways in which home care has benefited each person and reinforced the importance of home care and hospice in our nation's health-care system.

Research shows home care is more cost-effective than institutional care. The average home-care visit costs \$150; the average hospital day costs \$1,500. An industry study released by Avalere Health indicated that Medicare patients with diabetes, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), or congestive heart failure who received home health care within three months of being discharged from a hospital cost Medicare \$1.71 billion less and had 24,000 fewer re-hospitalizations than similar patients who used other forms of post-acute care over a two-year period.

### **About VNACJ**

Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey, now in its 97<sup>th</sup> year of service, is a nonprofit provider of home health care and hospice services. The organization also offers extensive community-based health and wellness services throughout its service area of Monmouth, Middlesex, Ocean, Burlington, and Gloucester counties, serving more than 100,000 people each year.

### **Photo Captions**

Capitol Hill photo – Kim Pahira, RN, Visiting Nurse Association of Central Jersey stands in front of U.S. Capitol where she testified before a congressional panel in opposition of cuts to Medicare home health benefits