

Testimony of Carol Langstaff on S. 231
February 28, 2024
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Vermont General Assembly

My name is Carol Langstaff. I am here to speak in support of S. 231. My remarks are background for the committee to understand why my town decided to support a health care coordinator. Even though there are similar services available through various agencies, gaps remain. I hope my story gives insight into the gaps that this bill can bridge.

I bought my place in Sharon when I was 21 and have lived here almost 60 years. Now, I want to age at home. I love my place. I think Vermont is all about a sense of place, though each town is different. The town of Sharon is spread out and many people are isolated. Also, it is a long way to get to hospitals and doctors. I feel the need for someone to help me with my medical and physical problems, and the Health Care Coordinator person has been a Godsend. Both my husband and I call her when we need her help. She comes or talks to us on the phone and helps with many, many things. The person we have currently is trained as an Occupational Therapist, so she is well suited to deal with most of my problems which are physical. I need help in figuring out how to do things I no longer can do in the same way. Our house needs to be rearranged to make it safer. She also helps me navigate the health system. I'm in the system, but need that help. So, she comes and helps in these ways. She also helps other people find out how to get services they need; finds volunteers to chat up or visit those who are isolated and alone; helps coordinate volunteers to give rides to doctor's appointments.

I also want to talk about the effect this has on our community. A lot of rescue groups get calls from people who have questions, and they wind up visiting them unnecessarily. So, when you have a Community Nurse or Health Coordinator in place the rescue visits that are not necessary go way down, which saves a lot of money. Also, this system scoops up many people who have not been getting proper treatment. There was a man in our town who was almost blind and was becoming more and more cut off. He was running out of water and wood. He had been on the fire department so they came and helped get his water fixed and some wood in. But, most importantly, our Care Coordinator got him to the right doctor and now he can see again and is back into the community. That's just one

really nice story. Overall, the effect of having a Health Care Coordinator in a town is really good. More volunteers get involved and learn about people who need a visit, need some food, need some medical help. It kind of brings the community together. We had potlucks where we introduced the Care Coordinator to each neighborhood which was a fun thing to do.

People sometimes confuse the Visiting Nurses with the Community Nurse or Health Coordinator. They're not the same thing at all. The Visiting Nurse gets referred by the doctor. The Community Nurse or Health Coordinator are not doctor driven. They respond to the needs of the people in the town. So, Community Nursing is not a health care service competing with other providers. It's a safety net for those situations for which health care services are not available or needed. It provides a holistic approach to helping people to get their needs met and be safe. They are free for anyone in the town. There is no reimbursement, no charge. They are there for anyone on a continuing basis. You get to know and trust this person.

I was working on a show about healing for my Flock Dance Troupe. I went to see Dr. Denis McCullough give a talk about The Essence of Healing. He had been my doctor and delivered my babies and he said Acceptance was the essence of healing. I was struck by that. He also told me at the same time about the Community Nurse effort he was doing and explained it. So, I put this in my show. The show told the story about a young man who had been in an accident and was paralyzed. The Community Nurse was able to help the family navigate the health systems, insurance--all the problems they had to face. And the Community Nurse also got the community to rally around him and help with his needs.

After the show I got some calls from townspeople in Sharon and Strafford who wanted the Community Nurse in their town. Sharon got together first. We formed a group that cared about this happening. The first thing we did was to get it onto the town five-year plan that they were working on. After that we got signatures from a lot of people in town who wanted this to happen and brought it up at town meeting. Some discussion took place. The first person to talk about it I put on the committee to make it happen! Then we got talking about the name. Denis McCullough came and explained to us what the Nurse really does. After listening to him we decided to title the position differently and called this person the Health Care Coordinator for the Town of Sharon.

After we formed this group, we raised money from individuals in the town; the Community Nurse Connection, based in the Upper Valley, gave us a start-up grant of \$1,000. Then we asked the Town of Sharon to pay \$3,000 into the kitty. That has continued since then and has been increased somewhat. The service is free for anyone living in the town. Most often it is used by older people with health issues.

I am grateful that the committee is considering this bill and hope you approve it.

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Langstaff
Board of Directors
Sharon Health Initiative