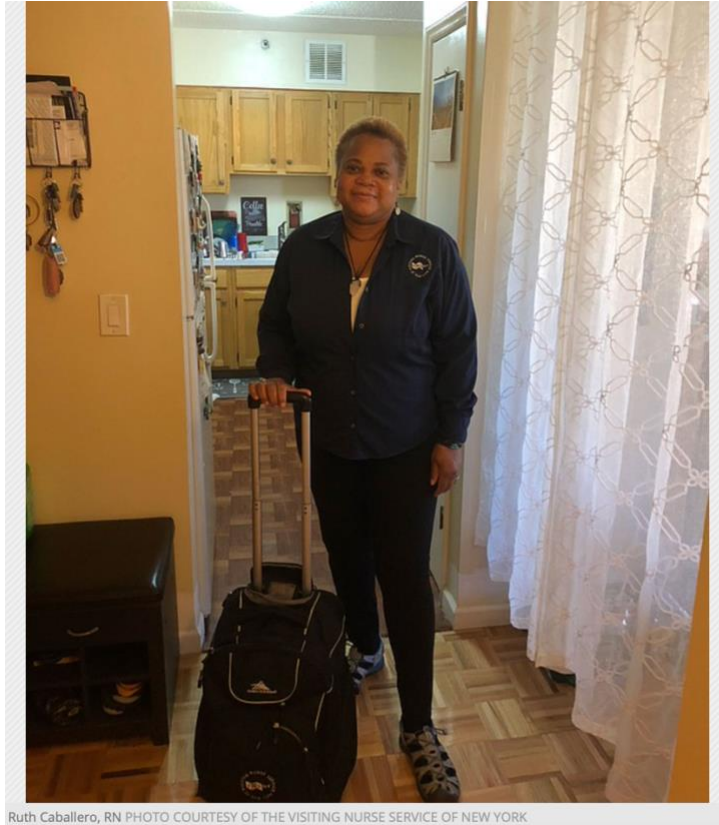


One year later—a frontline nursing hero continues the fight

CHANDRA WILSON | 5/13/2021, midnight



Ruth Caballero, RN PHOTO COURTESY OF THE VISITING NURSE SERVICE OF NEW YORK

National Nurses Month is a time to recognize the men and women who have dedicated their lives to the field of nursing. Home care nurses played a major role in New York City's response to the coronavirus health crisis last year—and they continue to do so today.

Ruth Caballero, RN, a home care nurse with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, was among the first frontline home care nurses to care for COVID-19 patients in their homes last year as New York City became the epicenter of the pandemic. Every day, she suited up with her mask, gloves and PPE, boarded the bus to Washington Heights, where she cared for patients just discharged from hospitals to recover from COVID-19.

A Harlem resident, Caballero has been a visiting nurse for nearly two decades, caring for New Yorkers of all ages and all walks of life, helping them return to strength so that they can live their best possible lives. "I never expected in my lifetime to experience a pandemic," said Caballero. "But the COVID-19 crisis challenged me to give 100% of myself.

During the height of the pandemic, I told all my patients that they had a fighter walking this walk with them and they could depend on me. That's still true today."

This year, Ruth is finding glimmers of hope in her day-to-day work, particularly as the number of COVID-positive patients in her care, particularly those who are facing critical health issues as a result COVID-19 has decreased drastically.

“There was much uncertainty during this time last year; so much was unknown. It took some time for individuals to learn COVID-19 symptoms presented only several days after infection, and then there were many who didn’t know what steps to take once they did present symptoms,” said Caballero. “Now, when I see COVID-19 patients discharged from the hospital, they’re more stable and less decompensated medically.”

While Caballero still feels a sense of alarm when encountering not wearing masks on public transportation throughout the city, she claims that many people have been more proactive about following CDC guidelines, getting tested and seeking care. In this new chapter, she is also hopeful about advancements in treatment.

As vaccines become widely available, Caballero has been avid in educating her patients through honest discussion, as well as sharing informational vaccine pamphlets in English and Spanish. VNSNY’s at-home vaccination services have also been a factor in patients choosing to receive one. As sensationalism and misinformation have created a sense of doubt, negativity, and, in many cases, fear and misconception toward vaccinations, Caballero insists that knowledge is key.

“I’ve seen patients who are not well-informed about vaccinations, whether they’re unsure how to receive them or if they are concerned about adverse effects,” said Caballero. “It’s never been required of me to share, but when I tell my patients that my family, my colleagues at VNSNY and I have received both doses of the vaccine, their worries are put aside. They’re often thankful to receive direct information from someone they trust and ultimately decide to get vaccinated, too.”

Caballero expresses a sense of gratitude as she speaks of her colleagues at VNSNY with whom she has fought a brave fight on the frontline of the pandemic. Being able to assist so closely in healing and the alleviation of fears, she says, has been humbling and a reminder of human kindness during an unprecedented time.

“I believe home care and our holistic approach have played a crucial role in the optimal wellness and regaining of independence for COVID patients we’ve seen,” said Caballero. “Visits are made by home health aides, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers and any additional caretakers one may require, so they are receiving close, attentive care seven to ten days a week on average. There are miracles walking among us constantly.”

Though enormous strides have been made for the past year, Caballero still urges communities to express caution and stay ahead to protect themselves against this deadly virus.

“We may never reach herd immunity,” said Caballero. “COVID-19 may very well be with us forever and vaccinations may even be necessary each year. While we know much more than we did last May, there is more to learn every day. It’s important that we continue to follow guidelines, talk to our doctors and ask questions if we have any concerns. The world of health care is always evolving, and it is crucial that we evolve with it and do what it takes to protect ourselves amid this pandemic.”

For more information about Home Health Care services from the not-for-profit Visiting Nurse Service of New York, or to be directed to COVID-19 resources, please visit www.VNSNY.org or call 1-800-675-0391.