

Nurse Elaine Gillard and Her Lifelong Calling for Caring



In response to the lack of access to essential health services within the Black-American population, Gillard has found her life's calling in serving patients from her community.

Leyrian Colón Santiago, June 05, 2025

Treating patients with dignity and with an awareness of the disparities that Black people face in accessing health care were the two main reasons Elaine Gillard decided to become a nurse 14 years ago.

"I felt a deep calling for caring for people. Just seeing all the disparities in health care, particularly in marginalized communities — it kind of fueled my desire to make a difference," said Gillard, describing the moment she realized that nursing was her life's calling.

According to a 2024 [analysis](#), Black-American New Yorkers experienced the lowest health system performance in the state compared to white individuals.

For Gillard, a 41-year-old native of Staten Island and a nurse at VNS Health Care, the disparities affecting the Black-American population were what inspired her to focus her nursing career on hospice care.

"I feel like healthcare disparities unfortunately affect Black communities, leading to worse health care outcomes. Having a Black nurse in these spaces helps bridge the gap in trust, communication, and cultural understanding," said Gillard, reflecting on how, over the past eight years of working in hospice care, she has witnessed the benefits of treating patients with dignity and being conscious of the racial implications in essential services like access to health care.

Gillard believes that being a Black nurse and caring for patients from Black-American communities helps foster greater trust in the health care system.

“Many Black patients have experienced discrimination or neglect in the medical space, so it makes them hesitant to seek care. When they see someone who shares their background, understands their experience, and treats them with dignity, it can ease anxiety and improve their overall health outcomes.”

Gillard, who studied Nursing at St. Paul’s School of Nursing and Chamberlain University, acknowledges that she would not have become the nurse she is today without the inspiration of pioneers like Jesse Sleet Scales, the first African American woman to work as a public health nurse in the United States.

“She just reminds me that this work we’re doing is bigger than me and bigger than anyone,” explained Gillard, speaking on how Sleet Scales has inspired her throughout her nursing career.

In the eight years she has served as a hospice nurse, Gillard believes her main mission has always been to provide the best care possible through mutual respect and patience.

“Representation in health care builds trust. Just having a Black nurse builds trust,” said Gillard.

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