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AM1480 Radio Station – Live Interview – Tuesday, May 26, 2020

Elsa Lam, RN, VNSNY Director for Branch 1 in Manhattan and Westchester

Note: Prior to Elsa, the President of Chinese American Medical Association, Dr. Yick Lee, was interviewed.

AM 1480 Host: We have also invited a nurse from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York to be our guest today. Her name is Elsa. Greetings, Elsa.

- Greetings everyone. This is Nurse Lam from the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

AM 1480 Host: Greetings Nurse Lam. As NYC slowly begins to re-open, what does VNS and their nurses do to prevent the spreading of COVID and what are the protocols to help and improve the care for the patients?

- Firstly, VNSNY has 127 years of history. Throughout our 127 years history, the Visiting Nurse Service of New York has helped our city fight disasters like Superstorm Sandy and illness like the Spanish flu and Ebola. We are ready and leading again with COVID-19.
- As soon as news of the virus broke in March and because there were daily updates about this new virus, VNSNY had formed an Emergency Response Team to begin issuing regular clinical and business alerts.
- Every week, our CEO and our Departmental Leadership conducts a weekly session to all employees to provide up-to-date information related to COVID-19. Managers Check List is reviewed with each clinician daily. We established safety protocols for clinicians and all our workforce—and these continue to evolve as we learn more about the disease. All VNSNY field staff have received detailed education on how to avoid exposure to the COVID-19 virus, including safe and effective use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and proper protocols.
- For those who may refuse home visits, the clinicians would use lots of telehealth to do disease management and education and address any questions the patients may have.

AM1480 Host: For the radio audience, would you clarify the difference between the services that a visiting nurse provides vs those who work at a hospital or a clinic?

- Visiting Nurse is almost like providing services at an emergency room at home. When patients return home from hospital or from a physician visit, physicians may think that their patients need a visiting nurse or a physical therapist to provide services at home; for example, it may be wound care that needs to be cared for by a visiting nurse or a patient may be newly diagnosed with diabetes or high blood pressure so the physician would recommend Visiting Nurse to educate patients and their caregivers at home on disease management including medications and self-care.

AM1480 Host: I see so it's like hospital at home. When patients need acute services, physicians will recommend VNS.

- Another example is when a patient has uncontrolled high blood pressure but isn't urgent enough to go to the hospital immediately, the patient's physician would recommend a visiting nurse to provide services at home to help better control of the condition.

AM1480 Host: So, if patient returns from a physician visit and still not well but doesn't need to go to ER, how would the physician be able to coordinate with the VNS to provide immediate service?

- A physician can contact VNSNY directly and we can possibly provide the service within 24 hours.

AM1480 Host: So, a patient must contact his/her physician to obtain visiting nurse service?

- That's correct. DOH requires to obtain the physician's permission in order for us to provide services.

AM1480 Host: I see, so the services could range from blood pressure checking to urgent matters. Most people would go to hospital thinking their condition require immediate attention at hospital. How would a person decide if they need VNS?

- This will be determined by the physician. We also have patients discharged from nursing facilities or return home from physician offices. Patients can discuss their request for our services and the physicians would be able to refer patients to us directly.

AM1480 Host: During this pandemic, would you say there is a surge in your services?

- Yes. Now, we are beginning to see an increase in both COVID and NON-COVID patients especially since many patients do not want to go to hospitals at this time, their physicians would refer them to us to provide services.

AM1480 Host: I see. So, after the visiting nurse visits the patients, you would report the status to the referring physician, correct?

- That's correct.

AM1480 Host: What kind of services do you provide to people with COVID after they discharged from hospital?

- Because people with COVID tend to be weak and may require physical therapy and nurses to monitor vitals and medication. We do see many of those patients requiring therapy services.

AM1480 Host: What kind of protection measures do the clinicians take as they need to take blood pressure and have contacts with the patients with COVID?

- As mentioned before, all VNSNY clinicians have received detailed education early on how to avoid exposure to the COVID-19 virus, including: wearing proper PPE and follow proper protocols based on the guidelines from CDC and DOH such as wearing surgical masks, N95 masks, goggles, booties, hair cover, gowns, gloves, face shields, etc.
- We also schedule COVID-19 visits at the end of day to dramatically help lessen the spread of COVID to other patients.

AM1480 Host: This is a great precaution to give people a peace of mind as most people are afraid to be infected by avoiding going to hospitals and physician offices. So, what happens when patients, especially those who are just discharged from hospitals or nursing facilities and choose to refuse the visits from Visiting Nurse Service if they need the care?

- If someone refuses a nursing visit, we may recommend a house call physician if appropriate. Or if after our initial assessment that a patient chooses to decline service, we will work with them to provide telehealth or virtual visits as appropriate to help ensure that they get the care they need.

AM1480 Host: Does Visiting Nurse only provide care to Asian patients?

- Not at all. In general, we provide care and services to all New Yorkers in our service areas and ranging from pediatric patients to patients who are more than 100 years old.

AM1480 Host: What services do you provide to pediatric patients with COVID?

- I haven't seen any pediatric patients with COVID who need services from us yet.

AM1480 Host: We hear that many patients with COVID are in the age group of 40's and 50's. Do you see mostly patients in this age group and are they mostly women with COVID in your care?

- I don't think that most patients are necessarily women but we do see many patients with COVID are over 50 years old.

AM1480 Host: My understanding is that visiting nurse takes care of patients discharged from hospital but you mentioned early about working with physicians. And can patients also obtain services from Visiting Nurse if they weren't hospitalized?

- As mentioned previously, patients can obtain our services without being hospitalized first. The example I provided earlier such as when a physician sees a patient and the patient is newly diagnosed with diabetes after bloodwork or that the patient has uncontrolled diabetes. The physician can then recommend VNSNY to help monitor the diet and other factors. Patients can also obtain our service after discharged from nursing facilities.

AM1480 Host: Can a patient request Visiting Nurse Service directly?

- Yes, patients can contact VNSNY directly to request the service but we need to work with the patient's physician to approve the service.

AM1480 Host: Have you seen patients needing to go back to the hospital after obtaining your services?

- Yes, I have seen patients needing to go back to hospitals. Sometimes, patients, not only patients with COVID, may be discharged a bit early from hospital. The nurse will then speak to the doctor that the patient may need to be admitted because of the sudden acuity of the health conditions.

AM1480 Host: That's good to know. Do two nurses usually make each home visit or it usually takes one nurse for each visit?

- Only one nurse makes each home visit. Unless the neighborhood may deem unsafe and VNSNY will provide a security guard to accompany the nurse. In Manhattan Chinatown, it's usually not necessary.

AM1480 Host: Does Visiting Nurse of New York provide services in all five boroughs or only in Chinatown?

- Yes, VNSNY provides services in all five boroughs which includes Manhattan, Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, Long Island and Westchester.

AM1480 Host: Do your nurses also work at hospitals or do they need a special certificate or license in order to become visiting nurse?

- In general, our company reviews a candidate's credentials which includes the school work, training, work experiences and whether they are suitable to be a visiting nurse.
- We also have a new special training for new nurses. It's a two-year training program so new nurses have more training and support. Home care nurses are different than those who work at hospitals because there are many other people at hospitals to assist. As a home care nurse, you are on your own so the nurse needs to have the skillsets and experiences to make the appropriate judgement.

AM1480 Host: We really admire and respect visiting nurses who are like angels. Nurses are very knowledgeable and patient especially people are usually not in a good mood when they are sick.

- Thank you. Besides patients, we also work with their family and caregivers to provide them with the education so they can take good care of the patients as well.

AM1480 Host: Since the number of COVID patients have dropped as less COVID patients are hospitalized and more people have recovered and discharged from hospital, does the trend have any impact on your services?

- We have already taken care of more than 1,500 patients with COVID and 300 of them have been successfully discharged from our service which means they got better and no longer need our services.

AM1480 Host: Are your nurses scared when taking care of COVID patients? Some of them might have been hospitalized for a month and can they still infect others?

- We can't say they are immune and we continue to make sure we take all the necessary precautions and wear proper PPE when seeing all patients including those with COVID.

AM1480 Host: Thank you very much Nurse Lam. Time is almost up. Is there anything else you would like to add?

- Yes. I would like to add that for anyone listening who is interested in inquiring more about VNSNY services, please feel free to contact our **VNSNY Chinatown Community Center**. Although the Center is closed to the public, there are **Chinese-speaking staff who are ready to answer the calls from 9am to 5pm 7 days a week. The phone number is 212-619-3072.**

AM1480 Host: Thank you so much again Nurse Lam. We appreciate you and we wish you good health.

- Thank you very much for having me.