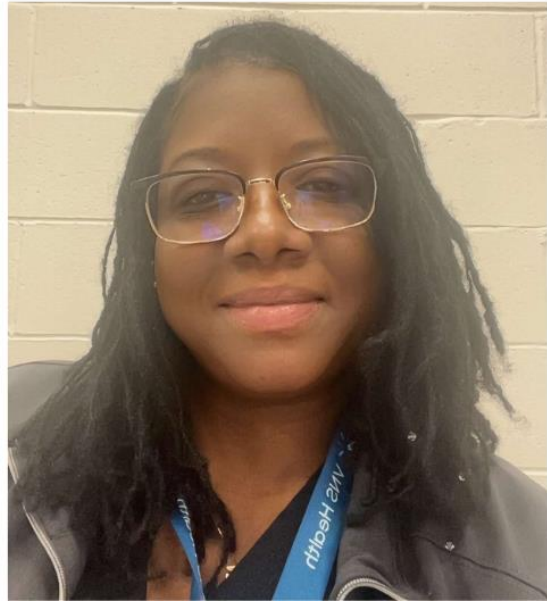


MANHATTAN VOICE

Home Care Nurses: The Beating Heart of Community Health



(Clockwise from top left: RN and Care Coordinator Constance Washington, Home Care Nurse Chona Odchigue, NORC Nurse Andrea Morris Arzu, Home Care Nurse Matthew Louie.)

By Constance Washington, RN, Care Coordinator VNS Health Health Plans, May 5, 2025

Many people might think that for nurses the workplace would be a hospital, clinic, or doctor's office. But for the [180,000+](#) New York home care nurses who provide care to people at home, the "workplace" could be a basement apartment, a 30-floor high-rise, a house with a 2-car garage, a park bench, or just about anywhere someone actually lives. In my 19 years as a Home Care Nurse and Care Coordinator with VNS Health, one of the nation's largest nonprofit home- and community-based health care

organizations, I've pretty much seen it all. And one thing I know—home is where people want to be if they can when they're recovering from surgery, illness or other health conditions.

This special group of frontline heroes is the “beating heart” of community health. Wherever help is needed—that's where we go. Home care nurses get a true snapshot of the factors that can impact a patient's health, from what food they eat to how they get around, and whether they have support at home to help them stay healthy. What I love about this job is knowing I'm making a difference in someone's life. As a nurse, we often take these things for granted, because for us, it's simply part of a day's work!

In May we celebrate National Nurses Month. It's a great time to say “Thanks” to any of these hard-working clinical experts—wherever you encounter them.

I'd like to share a little more about life as a nurse, through these insights from three of my fellow home care nurses at VNS Health working in across the city,

Health Detectives on the Case

Home Care Nurses often find themselves playing the role of “detective.” Home Care Nurse Chona Odchigue was helping an elderly man who had just been discharged from the hospital when she observed him wincing and grimacing. When Chona asked him if he was having chest pain, he said “yes,” but assured her he was alright. However, Chona could tell something more serious might be happening.

“It's not only what the patient is saying,” notes Chona, “You have to observe everything.” She knew her patient needed to go to the hospital, and the decision turned out to be lifesaving. At the hospital, the patient was assessed, and the doctors found he was having a heart attack. Thanks to Chona's quick thinking, she likely saved her patient's life. As she says modestly, “I'm just thankful that I could be there at the right time, at the right moment to act.”

Always There, Every Step of the Way

Andrea Morris-Arzu, a nurse for Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORC), knows the many patients she serves well. Coming into her regular “office” in the apartment building, her patients look to her as a “neighbor” just as much as a nurse. It's what she loves about the job—building trust and getting to really know her patients.

NORC communities are designed to provide care and support to older adults, many of whom are extremely isolated, with family far away or gone. One time, a 92-year-old woman told Andrea she wasn't sure she was taking her blood pressure medication correctly. “When I started asking her more and looking more closely, I quickly found out she was completely out of her medication and needed a refill urgently. So, I helped set up an appointment with her doctor and find an affordable transportation option.”

However, even with the appointment planned, Andrea knew they weren't out of the woods yet and took the woman's blood pressure. The numbers were alarming, and Andrea went into action. The woman was scared to leave her home, so Andrea asked, “What can I do to make you feel comfortable to go out and get help?” She helped her pack an overnight bag, even putting the dishes away so the patient wouldn't worry, and they called EMS together. The EMS agreed the signs were concerning and took her to the hospital. Since then, Andrea has continued to follow up with her patient, helping ensure she takes her medication correctly and letting her know she's not alone in her health care journey.

Listening with Heart

Nurse Matthew Louie is newer to the field of home care but has already found that listening is a big part of his job. While he might initially come in to care for a wound or help someone recovering from a fall, he's always mindful of his patient's mental well-being as well. "I love learning about people and hearing their stories. You can learn so much about people in their homes that you never get to see in a hospital setting."

One patient of his was going through a new diagnosis with a lot of understandable anxiety. "We talk about everything—philosophy, relationships—and her anxiety has lessened," said Matthew. "I heard her say, 'I'm lucky to have Matt as my nurse. I feel like I've gotten a nurse and a therapist.'"

Home care nurses truly embody the spirit of nursing itself—committed to providing compassion and support, while also helping patients make informed decisions about their health. Their empathy and dedication are a critical reminder of what "care" really comes down to.

To learn more about home care nursing, visit vnshealth.org

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