



Member Spotlight: Lauren Campbell



Home Care Association of NY, Nov 30, 2023

Interview with Lauren Campbell, Director, Emergency Management and Employee Safety, VNS Health

What led you into emergency response/preparedness to start?

Throughout most of my career, whether it was investigations, regulatory, or quality- focused, I've always worked in operations in the health care field, or at companies with a significant health care component. Unsurprisingly, working in this field, emergency management has always been a big part of what I do. I've enjoyed working in emergency management from the get-go. It's satisfying to see results happen quickly, and the impact on the safety of clinicians and those they care for.

I also like the fast-paced nature of the job, and working with various team members throughout the organization to strategically find ways to address a threat before it happens. Emergency Management is everything I have learned in my professional life, at a hundred miles an hour! I found that having action plans ready right away, helps us all to stay calm during those crazy moments. I truly rely on our VNS Health Emergency Response Team because we really support each other in those times where you need to make quick decisions. In some ways there's almost a military approach to this kind of work—you can have your different plans and ideas laid out in front of you, but you ultimately need to respond swiftly and make important choices as soon as possible.

Describe a typical day for you.

Every day is a little different, but the number one thing I am always doing is monitoring, whether through our emergency alert system (AlertMedia), researching emerging threats or just keeping an eye on what's going on in our world daily.

Throughout the day I respond to anything that comes my way, whether through email or through reports we receive from those in the field. VNS Health team members can report incidents to our database, and I work to review them, decide whether to escalate, or simply forward to the right person to help address that incident as soon as possible.

My days are also spent doing lots of preparation—making sure our emergency preparedness documents and emergency management documents are as current as they can be. Whether it's a response guide or our business continuity plans, all these plans are meaningful and purposeful in emergency management.

At VNS Health, we're proud of the fact that we're serving a wide and diverse population, and we are truly boots on the ground in some of the most vulnerable communities in the city. But NYC is also a big city, with typical big-city challenges. Some neighborhoods we work in experience higher levels of crime. So beyond incident reports, we're proactively monitoring to see the latest on crimes or major disruptions in New York City. As they arise, we can reach out to teams to check in via a survey, even something simple as a wellness check, asking, "are you okay?"

In addition to that, many field clinicians have access to the Alert Media tool and have a safety monitoring feature on their cell phones, which acts like a panic alarm. It also monitors their session while they're servicing clients. So should something happen, and the timer session ends, if they don't end it themselves, they're linked into Alert Media's command center. The command center has a relationship with all law enforcement to notify and conduct check-ins on an employee. If someone doesn't respond to that initial check-in from the command center, the system will contact law enforcement. The command center will then follow up with me, as administrator of the Alert Media system, if there is a confirmed panic alarm or employee safety threat. .

There's plenty of hands-on work to do as well, especially in training teams throughout the organization, whether on emergency preparedness or employee safety. I collaborate with teams to envision potential scenarios and how we would respond. When we look at different scenarios, we must consider the time from when an employee leaves their door to the time they get home, and beyond. Our team leaders take what we've planned and discussed during those trainings and incorporate it into their own scheduled meetings and promote general safety in the field day-to-day.

What do you see as the biggest challenges right now in your field?

While the challenges are always rapidly evolving, having such a strong emergency response team and knowledgeable staff means we're always ready to meet them head-on.

One of the top threats that has steadily grown across health care is the prevalence of cybercrime incidents. A few years ago, I would say it was maybe in the top ten threats we face, but these days it's much greater, and really one of the most pressing challenges. As technology rapidly changes, we must stay informed and educated, so we're regularly attending webinars, trainings, and tabletop discussions, to learn how to address cyber threats. When a system shuts down, we must have plans to keep work going—even if it means going old school with a pen and notebook during those times!

Another threat that might not immediately seem tied to health care operations is climate change. As extreme weather becomes more common, home care companies need to be especially mindful as our clinicians are out everyday rain or shine. While we can't predict what the weather is going to do, we can do everything to make sure our teams feel safe and prepared. Unfortunately, infrastructure in many cities hasn't kept pace with

climate change, so it's things like knowing what to do if our subway or trains go out of service during a flood? How do we safely navigate home visits when the air quality is bad?

And then, an ever-present threat is what we call "human" threats, from active-shooter crimes, neighborhood violence, and incidents like that. Responding to those situations remains top of mind.

What has been the most rewarding part of your job/career?

I find the work I do in emergency management to be incredibly meaningful; I love waking up each morning knowing that we're making a real difference. I like knowing that our team members feel supported and safe with a team behind them making these rational decisions and getting information out quickly. It's all about helping people at the right time, with the right information.

Ultimately, with everything we prepare for, our hope is that it doesn't happen, but it's comforting to know that if something does happen, we have the guidelines and structures in place to quickly respond and work with a clear focus. In cases where something new or unexpected comes up, being able to mitigate and quickly recover brings me a real sense of satisfaction.

Every class or training session is rewarding. I enjoy building relationships with our staff and letting them know they can always feel comfortable coming to talk to me about their concerns. I can tell people are grateful that we are on the job every day and thinking about their safety.

I'm a leader in my local church, and somebody once came up and asked me, "What is your goal in life?" What do you think your purpose is? Without even thinking, I answered "Helping people feel safe!" I know that wherever my career takes me, that will always be at the core of everything I do.

What is one thing you wish all home care staff knew?

Home care can sometimes feel a little siloed from everyone else in the health care field—even though what we do is critically important in keeping our community healthy. Emergency management is a huge part of that, and home care organizations shouldn't be afraid to work closely within their organizations and with outside partners to help increase safety and planning during that critically important transition from hospital to home.

On an individual level, preparation remains the most important thing we can do to stay safe. Simple things like sharing your routes with team members and family, and sharing your emergency contacts can make a world of difference. If something happens on a job site, be it a patient's home or the office, managers should know who to contact and who needs to be informed.

Anything that can help give you peace of mind is worth it in the long run!

For over 40 years, HCA has been a leading state and federal advocate for quality, community-based care. They represent hundreds of dedicated organizations and their thousands of home and community-based staff. They are a resource for information, providing policy and regulatory expertise, professional development, education and training opportunities. They reach an audience of at least 39,366 through their website, newsletters, and social media.