

## Bomb Cyclone Hits Home Care Providers in Northeast

By Amy Baxter | January 4, 2018

A major winter storm, dubbed a “bomb cyclone” for its rapid intensity, pummeled the Northeast region of the United States on Thursday, forcing in-home care providers to switch into overdrive to keep clients, patients and caregivers safe. Temperatures plunged across the East Coast as [blizzard conditions](#) and hurricane force winds hit the region from the Carolinas through New England.

In-home care providers were able to prepare ahead of the storm, calling patients and clients at home and making plans for care and supplies. The storm is the first major test of the recently-implemented emergency preparedness regulations, which went into effect September 15, 2017, for home health care agencies.

Home Health Care News caught up with several providers in the region.

### New York



New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo declared a state of emergency for New York City and its suburbs. With driving conditions becoming dangerous, staffers with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) ended up walking to make patient visits. Roughly 30,000 VNSNY patients were impacted by the storm, according to Susan Northover, RN, MHA, senior vice president of Patient Care Services of VNSNY.

Tom Pang, a public health RN with VNSNY who works on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, saw eight patients on Thursday, trudging through snow and even visiting one patient who wasn't scheduled for the day, but who couldn't get to a scheduled doctor's

appointment that day.

“The son [of the patient] was worried and concerned because he was supposed to take the patient for a followup with the doctor, and he got stuck and couldn't get in to take the father,” Pang told HHCN. “He called us to see if we could go see his father.”

After dressing the patient's wound and being supplied with coffee and juice, Pang continued to visit other patients. His advice for making it through a snowstorm on foot: “Eat a big breakfast and go to the bathroom before you leave.”

Everlin Gomez, another public health RN with VNSNY, also found herself walking to a patient visit after her taxi slid dangerously down the street. This particular patient needed medication that couldn't be

delivered by the pharmacy that day, so Gomez walked to the pharmacy and even paid the patient's co-pay herself before conducting the home health visit. The patient reimbursed her, she told HHCN.

The actions by the nurses are representative of the intense preparation that goes into a provider's operations during emergencies and extreme weather events, including a December practice drill with the new rules for VNSNY.

"The Visiting Nurse Service of New York has always been at the forefront of community care. As the largest not-for-profit home and community based home care organization in the country, serving New York's large metropolitan area, our nurses, home health aides, physical therapists, social workers, doctors and other clinicians are known for rising to the occasion when disaster calls," Northover told HHCN. "So many of our dedicated staff go out of their way to make sure that those they serve and their families have the care they need when nature disrupts our city as it has with the 'Bomb Cyclone.'"

In addition to meeting the new emergency prep regulations at the federal level, agencies in New York are already required to meet a set of "pretty robust" state regulations, according to Roger Noyes, director of communications of the New York State Home Care Association (HCA-NYS). Providers have "needed to fine tune their existing protocols, policies and procedures" to meet the additional federal requirements, he told Home Health Care News.

The state also recently [enacted a law](#) that requires input from home care providers in county emergency management plans. The association worked to link up providers with local emergency management officials in a statewide campaign that has so far reached 40 of the 62 counties in New York.

## **Massachusetts**

The Boston area saw heavy snowfall, below freezing temperatures and [near-record](#) water levels and flooding in several metro areas on Thursday. The Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based Amedisys (Nasdaq: AMED), one of the nation's largest home health care providers, has a major presence across the Northeast, and is the biggest provider of personal care services in the state of Massachusetts.

"Fortunately, Amedisys has an extremely robust emergency preparedness plan, which was put in place after Hurricane Katrina," stated Iris Rancatore, who leads the company's disaster preparedness efforts.

"Our regional and care center leaders have been working in conjunction with our corporate office to ensure Amedisys' patients are cared for throughout this winter storm," she said. "On January 2, our care centers in Georgia, Carolinas and the Northeast activated their emergency preparedness plans and began reaching out to patients to make sure the necessary medications, equipment and any other needs were in place. We are also hosting daily calls with regional and local leadership to check on patients and employees as well as reaching out daily to patients during the duration of the storm."

## **New Jersey**

New Jersey was among the states expected to see a significant amount of snow. Affordable Senior Home Care, a non-medical home care provider based in Toms River, New Jersey, prepared for eight to 12 inches of snow prior to the storm, as predicted by the Office of Emergency Management. However, the real snowfall was even higher.

“We are at 15 inches and still counting,” Tim Bradshaw, president of Affordable Senior Home Care, told HHCN on Thursday afternoon.

Similar to categorization of patients in New York, Affordable Senior Care gives clients care priorities based on acuity and needs during the storm.

“By prioritizing our patients during our initial assessment, we have categorized them as high, medium, and low priority,” Bradshaw said. “This enables us to notify our patients, families, and caregivers based on their needs. Our high priority patients, such as wound care, or patients with 24-hour oxygen, are dealt with first to make sure their needs are met. All clients are spoken to prior to the storm and instructions are then passed to the caregivers.”

## **Washington, D.C.**

The nation’s capital wasn’t hit with the worst of the storm, as of Thursday afternoon, but providers there prepared for a much heavier hit by moving resources into a ready position.

“We were prepared for the worst yesterday, even though we only got a couple of inches around the D.C. area,” John Bradshaw, CEO of D.C.-based home care company Georgetown Home Care, told HHCN. “We had to assume it was going to be much worse, so we began pre-positioning caregivers for our most acutely sick clients who cannot go without coverage. For those who may not need coverage as much, we called them yesterday to see what their needs would be. We also have 4WD vehicles to get caregivers to their clients houses if necessary.”

## **Pennsylvania**

Philadelphia-based Griswold Home Care, a non-medical home care company with 180 franchise locations and 20-company owned locations, ensured its clients were well prepared ahead of the storm, just like any other emergency event.

“In advance of any announced storm, we reach out to every client and caregiver to discuss their circumstances and what arrangements need to be made to ensure the safety and care of the client,” Matt Murphy, CEO of in-home care franchise company Griswold Home Care, told HHCN. “In many instances, we rely on family members to ensure the safety of their loved ones. In situations where there is no family involvement, we work with the Power of Attorney to ensure that arrangements are set and that the caregivers get where they need to be. Live-in caregivers and clients are generally already situated for care. In the event of power outages, etc., we typically try and guide clients and/or their families to governmental agencies for shelter and other types of relief.”

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