

Home care nurses for the win with VNSNY's Fatima Sanchez



Ariama Long, May 12, 2022

Fatima Sanchez, 52, has been a home care nurse in the Bronx for the last 21 years. She works with Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) while advocating for her industry as a specialty.

“You have to have a special heart, mind, and touch to do this job. You have to be that in order to be a home care nurse,” said Sanchez.

Sanchez was born in Harlem before migrating to New Jersey and raising her family, she said. Sanchez first became affiliated with VNSNY through a clinical site and now mainly operates out of Co-op City in the Bronx. VNSNY is one of the largest not-for-profit home- and community-based healthcare organizations in the U.S., and serves New York City and Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester Counties. Their mission is to work proactively to promote patients’ health and well-being by providing high-quality, cost-effective health care to vulnerable individuals in their homes and communities.

Sanchez believes that home care nurses as essential workers often don’t get enough recognition since they are a ‘one-man band’ medical team in someone’s home. She explained that home care nursing is quite a different profession from traditional hospital care.

“We have an array of disease management and different problems with chronic illness that we have to help people manage on a day-to-day basis,” said Sanchez. “It can go from hospice care all the way down to chronic care and adult teaching that we need to do.”

Her average day involves scheduling and visiting her patients in their homes, which she handles mostly on her own with support from VNSNY. She said that during the onslaught of COVID in 2020, it was hardest to make connections with patients when the masking restrictions required nurses to have personal protective equipment on from head to toe. She spent many visits educating patients about COVID on what little information was available at the time.

“For us it was hard to mask and gown up and not allow for the patients to see our face. Understand, you’re only seeing the eyes of somebody walking into your home,” said Sanchez. “A lot of the patients were like, ‘I want to see your face to have a connection.’”

She said her fondest memory during that difficult time was hearing the evening claps or people calling out thanks for nurses and frontline workers during the lockdown in March of 2020.

“Clapping those claps out the window in the afternoon everyday—I said this is for me and this is why I’m going to keep on going. This drive from the community made me into the nurse I am today,” said Sanchez.

Sanchez said that a home care nurse is afforded the time and opportunity to get to know a patient much better than a nurse in a busy hospital might, allowing for more precise care. “We have hands-on knowledge, experience, and intuition about each patient,” said Sanchez.

In some of the “economically” challenged areas in the Bronx, Sanchez said she relies on education, communication, and knowledge of the community to care for her patients. She likes to be innovative and come up with ways for patients to get the small medical materials they need, like pill boxes or compression socks, that they might not be able to afford.

“I have a compassion and I like to see things grow, I like to see transitions, and I like to make people happy,” said Fatima. “Especially at their worst time of illness. It can be death and dying—I like to bring that little piece of joy in their lives.”

If any readers think they might be in need of VNSNY services or want more info, they’re welcome to reach out at vnsny.org or call at 1-800-675-0391.

Published weekly, Amsterdam News is the voice of one of the largest and most influential Black communities in the country and the world. It has a print circulation of 15,000 and monthly page views of nearly 450,000.