

# MANHATTAN VOICE

## 6 Things You May Not Know About Home Health Care Nurses

May 09, 2022



Visiting Nurse Service of New York nurse Ruth Caballero. -Photo by VNSNY

**By Chandra Wilson**

**HEALTH** - May is National Nurses Month and this week is National Nurses Week (May 6-12). It is no secret that nurses (one of the fastest growing jobs in health care) are considered by many to be the backbone of the health care industry.

Let's take a closer look into the world of one kind of nurse who is always on the go—not in hospitals or doctor's offices—they're home health care nurses who visit patients at home.

What makes home health care nurses so special?

I spoke with Ruth Caballero, RN, and Philip Leon, RN, of Visiting Nurse Service of New York to gain insight into what these "visiting" nurses do and how their tireless dedication impacts the people they serve. Here are a few key takeaways from those conversations.

## **1. You don't choose home health care nursing. Home health care nursing chooses you.**

When asked what advice she would give someone interested in pursuing a career in home health nursing, VNSNY case manager Ruth Caballero says, "You cannot be in this job if you haven't had a calling."

A Bronx native, Caballero has been a nurse for 25 years in Manhattan and Washington Heights. She goes on to state that nursing is not a "backup plan" or a job for the weak at heart; you must have felt the call to action. Ruth stresses the importance of home health care nurses having a true passion for what they do, so much so that it becomes part of their DNA.

"I would do this job for free," Ruth says, "I will do this job when I retire."

## **2. Home health care nurses keep patients out of the hospital.**

Ruth started her career in a hospital setting, but soon became curious about home health care when she noticed that patients who were receiving care at home returned to the hospital less frequently.

"People don't realize that we're the bridge between being well and being hospitalized," she says. Expert care can make such a difference that research shows patients who don't get home health care are twice as likely to go back into the hospital as those who do.

## **3. Home health care nurses treat patients of all ages and a wide variety of conditions.**

There is a misconception that home health care nurses primarily treat elderly patients. However, these nurses provide personalized, quality care in a comfortable and familiar setting for patients of all ages, regardless of diagnosis or health condition. The services they provide also range in complexity from skilled nursing after or to prevent a hospitalization, to care management and assistance with daily activities that help people age safely at home (even when battling several chronic diseases). Specialized care for specific conditions like diabetes, heart disease, COVID-19 as well as education for patients and their family caregivers about how to stay healthy and make lifestyle changes is all in a day's work for home health care nurses.

## **4. Home health care nurses replicate a clinical setting in your home.**

What's the difference between a hospital nurse and a home health care nurse? "The main difference is the walls," says public health nurse Phil Leon, who has been caring for patients in their homes for more than 20 years. "We bring the clinical setting to the patient's house, which is a facet of nursing that a lot of hospital people don't really know about." Phil adds that many of patients he visits are former nurses and doctors themselves who are often amazed about what home health care nurses can do right in the home.

## **5. Home health care nurses have the advantage of getting a full picture of their patients' lives.**

Treating patients in their homes allows nurses to employ a holistic approach to healthcare. Home health care nurses get to see what the patient's home environment is like, whether or not they have family support, if there is access to food and medicine, and other critical components that make up a patient's wellbeing.

"We're often the 'eyes and ears' for the doctors," says Phil. "We keep those lines of communication open—and focused on our patient's health and well-being, no matter where they are on their health care journey."

## **6. Home health care nurses are teachers.**

Home health care nurses educate their patients on how to achieve what Ruth refers to as their “optimal level of wellness.” The goal is to get that patient to be independent and to understand their healthcare needs. Beyond cleaning wounds and administering medication, these nurses show patients the ins and outs of their conditions so they can better manage it themselves. They understand the value of hands-on care and constantly provide reassurance and connections, aiding with both physical and emotional healing.

“Every day we call on empathy, patience and persistence to help those we care for heal and live their best lives,” Ruth says. “When we see that smile, or the glint of recognition in someone’s eye, that’s a true reward.”

To learn more or explore how home health care could help you or a loved one, visit [VNSNY.org](http://VNSNY.org) or call [1-800-675-0391](tel:1-800-675-0391).