



VISITING NURSE SERVICE OF ITHACA AND TOMPKINS COUNTY

The Heart and Hands of Home Care



Volume 2

Issue 1

Visiting Nurse Service of Ithaca and Tompkins County
Quarterly Newsletter
Spring 2015

Spring is finally here! After months of cold, wet weather, I'm pretty sure we can all agree that spring is a welcome sign here in Upstate New York. All of us at VNS are happy to see more and more signs of spring pop up every day, whether it's a robin singing on a tree branch, crocuses and snowdrops peeking through the leaves, or the warm temperatures we've been enjoying, all of which are our reward for surviving another harsh winter!



Occupational Therapy, often abbreviated as "OT", incorporates meaningful and purposeful occupation to enable people with limitations or impairments to participate in everyday life. Occupational therapists work with individuals, families, groups and populations to facilitate health and well-being through engagement or re-engagement in occupation.

Occupational therapy relies on understanding the importance of an activity to an individual, being able to analyze the physical, mental and social components of the activity, and then adapting the activity, the environment, and/or the person to enable them to resume the activity. Occupational therapists address the question, "Why does this person have difficulties managing his or her daily activities (or occupations), and what can we adapt to make it possible for him or her to manage better and how will this then impact his or her health and well-being?"

Occupational therapy gives people the "skills for the job of living" necessary for "living life to its fullest."

VNS was excited to recognize National Occupational Therapy month throughout the month of April. As part of our patient care teams, we have two wonderful occupational therapists, Kelly Tucker and Pat Floyd. We know they, as well as the rest of our nurses and therapists, work very hard at helping their patients overcome challenges, and we are grateful to have them as part of our team!



EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT:

Kelly Tucker
OT, Visiting Nurse Service



Kelly's journey into the occupational therapy field began when she applied for any position available in a summer work program sponsored through her high school in 9th grade. She was placed at Little Falls Nursing Home and Rehab transporting patients to and from therapy, and fell in love with the idea of being an OT! She graduated from Utica College of Syracuse University in 2001 and has been an OT ever since.

Her favorite parts of being an OT are getting to know patients on a more personal level, learning about their lives and specific goals or needs to return them to what they feel makes them function successfully and happily, and being a part of the team that works with them to help achieve those goals. She believes the hardest part of being an OT is realizing and accepting that there are going to be unfortunate patient situations and/or issues that she cannot help change, or that patients don't *want* help changing.

Some of the challenges Kelly mentioned she tries to help her patients overcome are the inability to complete personal hygiene appropriately, difficulty dressing, especially reaching their feet/lower extremities, and decreased ability to problem solve when introduced to a new assistive device such as a rolling walker or cane, for example, how to transport meals, laundry, etc. with either one or both hands that are now needed to hold an assistive device.

One of the biggest challenges she has found in the OT field is limited patient incomes or insurance. She may have great ideas in regards to environmental changes or adaptive equipment that could benefit the patient, but the patient has no financial means or insurance to make it happen. Some solutions she's found to this are staying aware of community support groups that may have funding to assist lower income patients, using loan closets, and staying familiar with what's available at the various local dollar stores.

Here are some tips that Kelly has found especially helpful:

-Regular long handled tongs from the dollar store can be used in place of a reacher to assist in toileting hygiene, dressing, or just retrieving items from the floor.

-Dollar store tupperware cups and utensils can be heated up and easily molded to make nose cups or angled silverware for swallowing/feeding difficulties.

-A paint can opener can assist a person with limited fine motor coordination and/or strength open a pill box.

Visiting Nurse Service is proud of all our nurses and therapists, and we are very thankful for the wonderful care they provide to our patients. Please make sure to look for another employee spotlight in our next newsletter!

Our nurses and therapists love to get letters, and pictured below is one received by Laurie Robinson, VNS Director of Rehabilitation Services, giving praise to the wonderful job one of our physical therapists, Jake Blaine, did to help her gain back her independence and mobility.

Ithaca, N.Y. 14850
March 12, 2015

Mrs. Laurie Robinson
Dir. of Physical Rehabilitation
Visiting Nurse Service
138 Cecil A. Malone Dr.
Ithaca, N.Y. 14850

Dear Mrs. Robinson:

I recently had a month of bi-weekly PT instruction given by Jake Blaine, one of your physical therapists. I was recovering too slowly from a fall I had in December. In fact, I was slowly becoming immobile.

Jake was my "life saver"! I could have ended up bed-ridden and it might have hastened my "demise". He had a very gentle and pleasant demeanor. He teaches clearly, slowly, and simply, with encouraging phrases. It was easy, relaxing, and gratifying to follow his regime.

I began to gain back my strength and mobility without all the pain I had been experiencing. I am continuing to improve and am very grateful for his careful and effective treatment.

I have had many physio-therapists in my 87 yrs. - mostly in the past 40 because of severe arthritis. Jake ranks at the very top.

I am so grateful that your agency provides home physiotherapy. We are so fortunate to have you in our community.

Sincerely,

A Lovely VNS Patient
(Name Removed For Patient Privacy)



As the seasons change, some of our staff at VNS has also changed. Some familiar faces have moved on to their next adventure, and we wish them well. As they've moved on, VNS has welcomed some new faces:

~Jennifer Berry, RN~
~Karen Carroll, RN~
~Susan Lillie, RN~
~Sue Murray, Clinical Team Leader~
~Emily Riddle, Dietitian~
~Kristen Wallis, RN~

We are very fortunate to welcome so many new employees! And while we welcome our new employees, we also want to congratulate some of our current employees who have been promoted to new positions:

~Jessica McCracken, RN, from Case Manager to Clinical Team Leader~
~Tiffany Putnam-Northrup, RN, from Case Manager to Clinical Team Leader~
~Heather Howell, RN, from Case Manager to Start of Care Nurse~
~Joyce Jones, RN, from Case Manager to Start of Care Nurse~



Jessica McCracken



Tiffany Putnam-Northrup



Heather Howell



Joyce Jones

We are now looking for more case managers to fill the positions left by our new promotees! If you are an RN looking for an exciting, fun place to work, please look on our webpage, www.vnsithaca.org and visit the [Employment](#) section, then call our office at 607-273-0466 and ask to speak with Judy Eckard, our Human Resources Manager.

**Come Join The
Visiting Nurse Service
Team!**

When Medicare Pays For Home Health Care

Home care is a phrase commonly used to refer to a wide range of health and social services. These services are delivered at home to recovering, chronically or terminally ill persons or people with disabilities in need of medical, nursing, social or therapeutic treatment, and/or assistance with the essential activities of daily living.

Medicare will help pay for your home care **if all four of the following are true:**

1. You are considered **homebound**. Medicare considers you homebound if you meet the following criteria:

- You need the help of another person or special equipment (walker, wheelchair, crutches, etc.) to leave your home **or** your doctor believes that leaving your home would be harmful to your health; **and**
- It is difficult for you to leave your home and you typically cannot do so.

2. You need **skilled care**. This includes **skilled nursing care** on an intermittent basis. Intermittent means you need care as little as once every 60 days to as much as once a day for three weeks (this period can be longer if you need more care but your need for more care must be predictable and finite). This can also mean you need **skilled therapy services**. Skilled therapy services can be physical, speech or occupational therapy;*

3. Your doctor signs a home health certification stating that you qualify for Medicare home care because you are homebound and need intermittent skilled care. The certification must also say that a plan of care has been made for you, and that a doctor regularly reviews it. Usually, the certification and plan of care are combined in one form that is signed by your doctor and submitted to Medicare.

- As part of the certification, doctors must also confirm that they (or certain other providers, such as nurse practitioners) have had a face-to-face meeting with you related to the main reason you need home care within 90 days of starting to receive home health care or within 30 days after you have already started receiving home health care. Your doctor must specifically state that the face-to-face meeting confirmed that you are homebound and qualify for intermittent skilled care.

4. You receive your care from a **Medicare-certified home health agency (HHA)**.

*If you only need occupational therapy, you will not qualify for the Medicare home health benefit. However, if you qualify for Medicare coverage of home health care on another basis, you can also get occupational therapy. Even when your other needs for Medicare home health end, you should still be able to get occupational therapy under the Medicare home health benefit if you continue to need it.

If you have questions about billing issues for home health care you should contact 800-MEDICARE

Ready Or Not Grant Awarded To VNS

Another change Visiting Nurse Service is welcoming is the redesign of the Medicaid program in New York state. To help prepare for the upcoming changes to the program, VNS has been chosen to participate in the Ready Or Not program, funded by the Health Foundation of Western and Central New York. Through this program, VNS will be able to strategically respond to changing economic, policy and regulatory environments.

(Taken from the Health Foundation's Website)

“The Health Foundation for Western and Central New York is dedicated to improving the health and health care of the people and communities of western and central New York. Based in Buffalo, NY with a second office in Syracuse, the Health Foundation is an independent private foundation that serves the eight counties of western New York, including Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua, Erie, Genesee, Niagara, Orleans and Wyoming, as well as the counties of Cayuga, Cortland, Herkimer, Madison, Oneida, Onondaga, Oswego and Tompkins in central New York.

It has three focus areas: improving the health and health care of vulnerable older adults; improving the health and health care of children ages birth to five who are impacted by poverty; and ensuring that communities across the regions have the capacity to effectively address health needs.

Its visions are that all vulnerable older adults are able to plan for and maintain a dignified, independent, high-quality life in their community; all children impacted by poverty are physically, socially and emotionally healthy as they enter kindergarten; and all communities are able to effectively plan for and address the health needs of the most vulnerable and those in poverty.”

For more information about the Health Foundation and its work, please visit www.hfwcnny.org.



Look for our next quarterly newsletter in Summer 2015,
and in the meantime, click here to sign up for our mailing list:

<http://www.vnsithaca.org/contact.html>

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