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Visiting Nurse Service Discharged 94% of Recovering Covid Patients: Study

After taking on 1,409 recovering Covid-19 patients between April 1 and June 15 following hospital stays, the Visiting Nurse Service of New York discharged 94% of them from home health care, according to a study published Monday in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

The study—completed by VNSNY's Center for Home Care Policy & Research—found that persisting symptoms and functional dependence were common at the time of home health care admission but improved for most patients. It also found that heart failure and diabetes were among the characteristics present at admission that put individuals at greatest risk for rehospitalization or death.

The cohort of patients studied came from 64 hospitals, VNSNY said. At the start of home health care—which averaged 32 days—69% had hypertension, 41% had diabetes, and 16% had chronic pulmonary disease. Half of the group reported exhaustion, 22% had difficulty taking their medications, 50% reported anxiety or confusion, and 84% reported trouble breathing with exertion. On average, the cohort needed assistance with six out of nine activities of daily living.

Collectively, the patients received 13,926 skilled professional visits, VNSNY said. Some 76% of those visits were provided in person, while 16% were provided by telephone, and 8% were provided by televideo. Registered nurses provided 52% of the visits, and physical therapists provided 37%.

Following home health care, the percentage of patients reporting daily pain fell from 41% to 6%, and the percentage of patients experiencing no trouble breathing with exertion increased from 16% to 73%, VNSNY said. Cognitive alertness for the cohort grew from 71% to 87%, as did the percentage of patients with no anxiety, from about half to 82%. The average number of functional dependencies decreased from six to just one.

As for adverse outcomes, about 10% of patients were readmitted, VNSNY said. And about 1% died.

VNSNY noted no direct funding for the study. It said that limitations include that it focuses solely on patients from one home health agency and doesn't compare the cohort to counterparts not receiving home health care. However, VNSNY said the results are promising.

"We suggest that we may want to consider calling upon home health care in the future for Covid survivors," said Kathryn Bowles, vice president and director of the Center for Home Care Policy & Research, and professor and chair in nursing excellence at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing.

It can provide a safe haven for patients outside of institutional settings as well as an alternative for hospitals in terms of discharge planning, Bowles said.

"We do feel like home health care is a place that could relieve some burden upon the hospitals," Margaret McDonald, associate director of the Center for Home Care Policy & Research, added.

Though many hospitals have opened centers for post-Covid services, home health care is meant for some of the sickest and weakest patients. VNSNY began [taking on](#) recovering Covid patients from area hospitals during the height of the crisis. The nonprofit home health care agency serves tens of thousands of individuals each year in the city and neighboring areas. —J.H.