

QUEENS VOICE

Social worker Joseph Alvino on how 'connecting with others can really help'

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By Chandra Wilson

[During the April peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City last year, social worker Joseph Alvino was sick with COVID-19 himself.](#)

"I had every symptom in the book," he says. He was also mourning the loss of his father from the illness. But Joe, who has been with VNSNY for over 25 years, opted to continue visiting patients by telephone, in keeping with COVID-19 protocols, a heroic act that gave him purpose and provided patients with a compassionate and expert resource.

"It was important for me to keep my mind busy and active, doing the best I could to help my patients with all they're dealing with," says Joe.

A full-time social worker with VNSNY Home Care in Queens, Joe cares for patients coping with a variety of medical conditions and for their often-overburdened family caregivers. During last year's peak, at a time when even the simple act of going to the grocery store felt riddled with peril, he helped clients get through the day, bringing them updated information on the virus and preventive measures and assisting them in navigating the anxiety and depression amplified by the need to socially distance from friends and family members.

Joe recalls one client telling him that his phone call made her day.

“A phone call might not seem like much on the surface,” he says, “but considering what everybody was going through, it meant a lot. Reaching out and just having a conversation goes a long way, especially when people can’t visit with their families. I ask open-ended questions about their concerns, validate their feelings, and try to normalize what they are going through. I don’t sugar-coat things—they have every right to be anxious. It’s a frightening time but connecting with others can really help.”

“While the pandemic has limited access to many community resources and services, Joe and his fellow VNSNY Home Care social workers, along with colleagues across VNSNY, have coordinated closely to share information and problem-solve together to address the needs of patients and each other.

Joe is particularly grateful for the compassion he received from his colleagues as he battled COVID-19 and mourned the death of his father on April 14. “Everybody has been so supportive,” he says. “Everybody stands out. That makes a difficult situation just that much easier.”

Visit www.VNSNY.org or call 1-800-675-0391 to learn more about home- and community-based services that can be integrated into your health and wellness needs.