



Visiting Nurses Put Your Family First: Balance Taking Care of Your Family and Theirs Over the Holidays

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By SAUNDRA YOUNG

When you or a family member are released from a hospital or other health care facility but still need continuing care, chances are you will soon be seen by a visiting nurse.



"Going into these homes routinely to assess these patients and provide the care they need at home and give them the tools that they need to be comfortable at home is something that is very rewarding," said 38-year-old hospice nurse Elaine Gillard.

A wife and mother of two daughters ages 16 and 20, she has been a registered nurse (RN) for eight years, spending the last three as a visiting nurse in Staten Island with the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY) Hospice and Palliative Care.

According to Zippia, a company that has estimated statistics on visiting nurses, there are more than 16,000 visiting nurses in the United States. Most are women and about 11 percent are African American. The average annual salary is about \$55,000.

*Elaine
Gillard Hospice
Nurse*

Visiting nurses manage specific caseloads on a weekly basis. They come to you, helping you make the transition from inpatient to outpatient. They spend countless hours providing care

in the comfort of your home. Rain or shine, 365 days a year. And that means they are with you or your loved ones on Christmas.

Lifting up

"Seeing patients on the holiday gives them a lot of joy. Many of the patients I see don't really have people coming out to see them on the holidays. Sometimes the families are very distant, patients may be living alone, or they have home health aides, and the families visit only now and then, so just to have someone coming in the home on the holiday as a companion, is a blessing."

"It lifts them up, it shows that someone cares. A lot of times when we're in a home on holidays we end up reminiscing with our patients. When we help them reminisce about happier times and traditions, it uplifts them. It's really something that I love to do. It doesn't really take much out of my day because I still can go home to my family, but it's a blessing to be able to uplift someone especially when they don't really have anyone to do that."

Gillard says she feels it's her "duty" to be there for her patients no matter the day, and that it's about balancing the time between her family and her patient.

"I feel like at the end of the day I'm still going to be able to go home to my family and enjoy festivities with them but taking a little bit of time out and creating that balance for others is not really a burden, it's a blessing to be able to do it."

Each state has their own Visiting Nurse Service. The VNSNY has been meeting the home health care needs of New Yorkers for more than 125 years. They are one of the oldest and largest not-for-profit home and community-based health care organizations in the country. On any given day, VNSNY has about 40,000 patients in their care. They have over 1,500 registered nurses and licensed practical nurses in the community.

Public health nurse Denise Simmonds is one of them. The 49-year-old wife and mother of three grown children lives and works in the Bronx. She has been an RN for 22 years, 20 of them as a visiting nurse with VNSNY Home Care. She says she's spent her fair share of Christmases caring for her patients.

"It's different. When you first go out on the holidays you think everyone's at home with their family and everything is well, and you come to realize that life goes on. That not everyone has the pleasure of celebrating the holidays, that health and happiness and peace are not always the situation. As a visiting nurse there is always someone or a family depending on you to provide care and service."

She says patients are very welcoming to them on the holidays.

"There is that understanding that you're giving up your time to come help them and that they need you. People say things like 'whatever time you come, we appreciate it, thank you so much; we didn't know how we would get through this without your help.' This happens particularly when they're first coming home from the hospital, so you don't go out on a holiday with a heavy heart because when you go into a home and you get that appreciation from someone who doesn't understand what to do, someone who needs you, it enriches your soul, it really does."



*Denise
Simmonds Public
Health Nurse*