



Home Care Provides Lifeline for Patients in Hurricane Sandy's Wake

Home care agencies, nurses, therapists and home health aides played a vital role in response to Hurricane Sandy, reaching vulnerable patients in need of services, supplies or assistance with evacuation.

Their efforts in the lead-up and aftermath of this unprecedented storm show what an essential asset home care providers are during times of crisis — just as they provide critical supports to elderly, disabled and chronically ill patients each and every day.

Here are some of their stories, as reported by national and local media.



"They'd been trapped in high-rise buildings without water, heat or working elevators, [Jewish Home Lifecare's Laura Radensky] said, and "in a lot of instances, we're the only ones making contact."

“About 150 of the agency’s 1,200 home-care clients faced potential crises, she estimated... For five days, Ruth Weissblatt endured the storm and its aftermath in her Manhattan apartment with a loyal home care aide who on Sunday took the last No. 3 train out of Brooklyn to join her. Ms. Weissblatt, 98 and ailing, had sufficient food, water and flashlights only because her 67-year-old nephew came by each day, lugging supplies up nine flights. “I can’t imagine how anyone my age could survive without that kind of help,” she said.

-New York Times, “Old, Frail and in Harm’s Way”



"Rosita checks Carmen's blood pressure, takes her temperature, makes sure she's all right."



“I want to take you out into an invisible world in the skies of New York City ... They are out in the dark, the National Guard, city meals on wheels, carrying heavy loads up stair after stair in high rises – people like nurse Rosita Ortiz, one of the thousands of people who work for the Visiting Nurse Service of New York, checking on patients who have little food, little water, no power... Rosita checks Carmen’s blood pressure, takes her temperature, makes sure she’s all right.”

-Diane Sawyer, ABC World News, accompanying Nurse Rosita Ortiz on visit to patient’s home

"Godfrey and Bradley immediately volunteered to lend a hand downstate ... They worked four consecutive 12-hour overnight shifts at a Nassau Community College shelter designated for special needs victims: the elderly, the disabled and the ill."

“At their shelter, 107 people crammed into 107 cots and needed food, water, clean sheets, blankets, clothes and – as the nurses soon found out – much, much more.

-Daily Gazette, “Nurses aid Storm’s most vulnerable victims,” a report on Visiting Nurse Service of Schenec:ady and Saratoga Counties Nurses Kim Godfrey and Kathy Bradley who volunteered in the region affected by Hurricane Sandy

“One lasting image of Superstorm Sandy will be very sick patients being evacuated from flooded hospitals. But less visible are thousands of patients who rely on visiting nurses and home health aides for care ranging from bathing and feeding to oxygen and ventilators.

Orael Keenan runs a Visiting Nurse Association in Nassau County, Long Island, where 80 percent of the area lost power – including her own office until Thursday afternoon. Phone service was out until Friday. Thirty-two of her 400 clients were evacuated from their homes to a family member or another caregiver's home.

Durable medical equipment companies delivered needed supplies ahead of the storm and were out again by Thursday “so anybody who needed a tank of oxygen was able to get it,” she reports.

But by week's end Keenan's nurses – and those at other agencies NPR talked to – were literally running out of gas. “It's an extreme issue,” Keenan says. “Some of my nurses are down to a quarter of tank and they're sitting at a gas station right now. Sooner or later, this will impact care.”

NPR Shots – Health News, “Home Health Care Proves Resilient In Face of Sandy Destruction”

“Remarkably, home care providers say they know of no patients who lacked for needed care in the storm's wake. Resourceful nurses, physical therapists, aides and other personnel somehow surmounted flood, impassable roads, downed trees and dwindling gasoline to get to their patients.”

“As two burners on his stove provided warmth on Thursday, Suzanne Gilleran, 47, carefully cut the gauze around Mr. Oberlin's leg. “How's your pain today?” she asked. “Did you take anything?”

As parts of the city edged toward some semblance of normal on Thursday, tens of thousands of people like Mr. Oberlin, who depend on essential home medical care, remained tenuously connected to lifesaving services by agencies like Partners in Care, an affiliate of the Visiting Nurse Service of New York.

New York Times, “Enduring the Storm for Homebound Patients”

“Nine flights above East 22nd Street, Russell Oberlin, 84, had no heat or electricity, no phone, no elevator service and two cancerous tumors on his right leg that required daily medical attention.”

“In the Sheepshead Bay area of Brooklyn, where flooding reached the second floor and destroyed insulin supplies, Sergey Nazarenko, another nurse with VIP Certified Health Services, helped some 160 residents in a facility for the mentally ill wade to rescue buses that carried them to a psychiatric facility in the neighboring borough of Queens.”

“On Brooklyn's Coney Island, where the sea flooded basements of high-rise apartments, knocking out lights, heat and elevators, nurse Igor Friedman with Brooklyn, N.Y.-based VIP Certified Health Services climbed 20 stories in a pitch-black stairwell to give his patient a badly needed insulin injection.

In Garden City, Long Island, where many streets were impassable for cars – if there was gas to fuel them – RN Irene Gerland with Winthrop University Hospital Home Health Agency in Mineola, Long Island, mounted her

bicycle to visit patients over a nine-mile route. While she found that several had been taken away by family members, others were alone in the dark without heat and no way to replenish prescription drugs, she says.

Home Health Line, “Hurricane Sandy: home health nurses excel in a tough test”



388 Broadway
Fourth Floor
Albany, New York 12207



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