

OP-ED: This Nurses Month, a seasoned veteran looks back

As I ride the train to East Flatbush, the car is quiet, with the rush of business commuters and students long gone. In the silence, I have a moment to catch my thoughts, and I am struck by how many times I've made trips like this—by train, by foot, by car—to visit my patients.

I remember when I first started as a homecare nurse with Visiting Nurse Service (VNS) Health—how daunting but also exciting it felt to visit each new patient. Coming from my past career as a teacher, I knew how to be there for others, but this was a whole new world—one where I was there to care for my patients physically and mentally...and all in their own homes. It felt like a lot to manage!

Now, in comparison, with more than a decade of experience as a nurse, I feel calm and ready for the day as I step off the train and walk to see my patient. This time, I am no longer a novice nurse but a Nurse Preceptor—a mentor for nurses entering the field of home healthcare. I'm on my way to meet Nogee, one of the many nurses I have mentored. My role as a Nurse Preceptor is very much a combination of both education and nursing. As preceptors for VNS Health's Nurse Residency Program, my RN Preceptor colleagues and I provide hands-on, in-field training to nurses who are new to home care. After all these years, I have now melded my past and current careers together, and I love that feeling.

This morning, Nogee is scheduled to perform a pneumothorax

drainage—a procedure she's studied in the classroom and performed with a patient once while shadowing me. Today, I let her take the lead, and she does a great job. It's heartening to see this talented new nurse grow in confidence.

This being National Nurses Month, I am reminded of just how important the work we do is, and also how unique and special this career field is. I'm proud and privileged to help talented nurses learn and thrive in this highly rewarding profession. It truly brings me joy to help the nurses I mentor grow as caregivers and build the skills they need to succeed as home healthcare nurses.

With training and support, most of our nurses discover they have a true passion for delivering care in the home. As Nursing.org [reported in 2022](#), home care nurses reported some of the highest rates of satisfaction compared to other specialties. Understandably, though, nurses entering the field today have their fair share of challenges, especially those who started at the height of the pandemic in 2020, when all of us had to adjust to a rapidly changing health landscape.

One of VNS Health's newer home care nurses is Robert Yore, who, like me, was also a teacher before he entered the healthcare field. Robert came to nursing because he was seeking a job where he could earn more, have greater flexibility, and pursue a career where he could help others. This brought him to the Nurse Residency Program at VNS Health. Given his background as an educator, Robert had a great appreciation for the nurturing and support that his VNS Health Nurse Preceptor, Nancy Girlando, provided.

Robert, who now works in Nassau County, says the training and

support he received from Nancy and others at VNS Health helped him carve a clear path to where he is today. “Nancy helped me build confidence in my skills and my ability to connect with patients in the home care setting,” Robert said. “She’s always there if I need guidance. Having Nancy as a mentor has given me such a great foundation.”

Whether helping a patient learn how to take a new medication or teaching a family caregiver about symptoms to look out for, home care nurses not only care for patients and their loved ones, but educate them as well. Now that he’s a few years into home care nursing, Robert has been pleasantly surprised to see how much his teaching expertise comes into play with his patients. “Teaching comes easy for me, and having that past experience made me feel like I had a leg up,” he said.

While I work primarily as a mentor and teacher in the field of healthcare, I find self-growth and education never truly ends for me—or for any nurse. Even as a preceptor, there is still much I am learning. For example, my fellow preceptors and I have a group chat where we bounce ideas around; discuss new tools, resources, and approaches; and enhance our own skills and learning. No matter where you are in your career journey, having support and guidance from peers, including those with more experience than you have, makes a world of difference. We learn and grow every day.

I’m so grateful to have found a profession where the work I do has such a meaningful impact on others.

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