The first thing that Carlos* said to his nurse when they met at Harlem Hospital was, “Are you the lady that’s going to help me get home?”

“And that’s how the ice broke,” said a nurse with VNS Health Hospice Care. She did indeed help Carlos return home after 65 days in two hospitals, suffering from COVID-19 and several chronic illnesses.

She arranged for the medical equipment, including a hospital bed, and the interdisciplinary care Carlos needed at home. And she educated his spouse, Iris, about what to expect during the course of his illness. “He had breathing issues and hadn’t been home in weeks, so it’s scary,” said the nurse, who also helped the family navigate advance directives. “We’re here to educate, to show them what to do, explain every step. I told Iris she could call any time, and she felt much better.”

“I was scared. VNS Health’s support gave me comfort and hope,” said Carlos’s spouse, Iris.
Iris did call frequently. “I was scared,” she said. “VNS Health’s support gave me comfort and hope that I was going to get the help I needed.” Carlos’s care team, which includes a nurse, doctor, social worker and spiritual care counselor, helps the family manage his symptoms and navigate the emotional, social and logistical complexities of end-of-life care.

Carlos is delighted to be home, surrounded by family and friends, who visit often, observing COVID-19 guidelines of masking and social distancing. “Everybody feels in a better place at their own home,” says Iris. Carlos is much beloved in his Brooklyn community, the kind of neighbor who, after he swept the sidewalk in front of his house, would then sweep the entire block. “People would come out and say hello,” says Iris. “Whoever needs help, they can count on him.”

*Patient and family names have been changed to protect privacy.*