

SUMMER 2021 | VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3



VNSNY TODAY

NEWS FROM THE VISITING NURSE SERVICE OF NEW YORK



SUMMER 2021 | VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3



VNSNY TODAY

NEWS FROM THE VISITING NURSE SERVICE OF NEW YORK

New VNSNY Business Unit Will Provide Management Services to Health Organizations Nationwide

Since the start of the year, VNSNY has been laying the groundwork for the launch of a new business line that will offer management services and related technologies to health plans and providers nationwide. This new Management Services Organization, or MSO, will provide a range of services on a contract basis, including management of hospice benefits, administration of managed long-term care products, and technology solutions for the home care space.

"We're already providing managed care services for 25,000 New Yorkers through our highly rated VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans," says Lori Ferguson, Senior Vice President and Chief Managing Director of the MSO. "This new business line will allow us to bring those services to many thousands more—and do it quickly."

Since its incorporation in May, the MSO has been actively refining its product offerings in anticipation of its official start date on January 1, 2022. Essentially, the new unit is allowing VNSNY to spin off CHOICE's deep



VNSNY's new MSO business unit will offer management services and related technologies to members and patients of health plans and providers across the U.S.

Continued on page 2

Partners in Care Seeks Solutions to Home Health Aide Shortage

Between America's aging population and seniors' growing preference to receive care at home due to COVID-19, demand for home health aides (HHAs) is soaring. In response, Partners in Care, VNSNY's licensed home care services agency, has been ramping up its HHA recruitment efforts while also supporting legislation that would provide government funding to boost HHA wages—viewed as a key step in combatting the chronic shortage of HHA workers nationwide.

"We held a series of HHA hiring events in New York's five boroughs and the surrounding counties in July and August, which resulted in our hiring nearly 100 new HHAs," says James Rolla, Senior Vice President of Partners in Care. While these additions to its 6,000-plus HHA workforce are welcome, says Rolla, recruiting remains a challenge. "Partners in Care provides excellent benefits to our HHAs, including health insurance, a pension plan, and flexible work schedules," he says. "Still, it's not an easy marketplace as far as hiring is concerned."

Continued on page 3

Also in this issue:

- VNSNY Introduces Customized Support for LGBTQ+ Patients
- CHOICE to Offer Two New Medicare Plans for 2022



An Interview with the President of VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans

Dr. Hany Abdelaal talks about CHOICE's new plan offerings and the challenge of managing care for members with complex needs.

Over the past several years, CHOICE has emerged as a leader in New York's quality ratings with its Managed Long Term Care and Medicaid Advantage Plus (MAP) health plans, while its SelectHealth special needs plan has set the pace in helping members manage HIV successfully. In addition, CHOICE recently announced that it will offer two new Medicare plans for 2022. VNSNY Today spoke with Dr. Abdelaal about CHOICE's current and future direction.

You have over 25,000 members in your three existing plans—CHOICE MLTC, CHOICE Total MAP plan, and CHOICE SelectHealth. What prompted CHOICE to offer two new Medicare plans for 2022?

Let me start by saying that this is an exciting time at CHOICE. We've made significant investments over the past five years on our infrastructure, our technology

Continued on page 4

SUMMER 2021
VOLUME 7, ISSUE

3

New VNSNY Business Unit Will Provide Management Services to Health Organizations Nationwide

Since the start of the year, VNSNY has been laying the groundwork for the launch of a new business line that will offer management services and related technologies to health plans and providers nationwide. This new Management Services Organization, or MSO, will provide a range of services on a contract basis, including management of hospice benefits, administration of managed long-term care products, and technology solutions for the home care space.

“We’re already providing managed care services for 25,000 New Yorkers through our highly rated VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans,” says Lori Ferguson, Senior Vice President and Chief Managing Director of the MSO. “This new business line will allow us to bring those services to many thousands more—and do it quickly.”

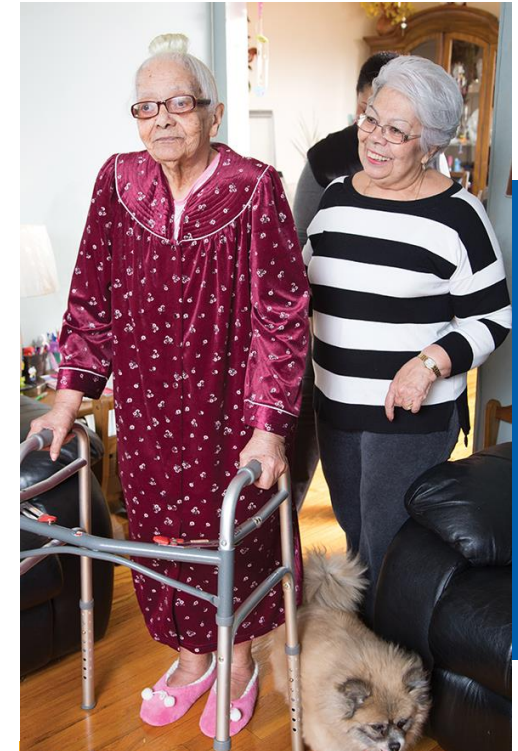
Since its incorporation in May, the MSO has been actively refining its product offerings in anticipation of its official start date on January 1, 2022. Essentially, the new unit is allowing VNSNY to spin off CHOICE’s deep expertise in managing complex populations into a stand-alone unit that can then offer solutions more widely. As the former SVP of CHOICE Integrated Plans, Ferguson is one of several hundred VNSNY staffers who are moving from CHOICE to the new MSO, where they’ll continue providing management services to CHOICE as well as other risk-bearing entities.

One of the most exciting aspects of the MSO, says Ferguson, is its potential to serve markets outside New York State, which has long been VNSNY’s traditional

operating region. In another departure, the MSO will be structured as a for-profit entity within the not-for-profit umbrella of VNSNY as a whole. “The MSO’s for-profit status doesn’t mean it will be any less mission-driven,” notes Ferguson. “But it does mean that we can bring our mission and expertise to more lives across the nation.”

Managing hospice benefits for other organizations will be an early focus of the MSO, says Josie Aquino, Director of Product Management for the MSO Implementation team. VNSNY CHOICE is one of nine health plans currently participating in the Hospice Benefit Component of the federal government’s Value-Based Insurance Design Model Demonstration. It’s anticipated that the list of insurers participating in the demonstration will increase significantly in 2022, and VNSNY’s experience will be valuable to payors in managing this population. “We have extensive knowledge and expertise in identifying and managing the needs of individuals at end of life,” explains Aquino, “so we believe this is an area where we can provide real value to other health plans.”

In preparing for the MSO’s launch, its staff is also working intensively to optimize various management functions with an eye to bringing a transparent and refreshing partnership to payors. “We want to be the collaborator of choice for health plans across the U.S.,” says Aquino. “To that end, we’ve made great progress in our preparations for partnering with organizations seeking to implement solutions for their medically complex populations.”



VNSNY’s new MSO business unit will offer management services and related technologies to members and patients of health plans and providers across the United States.

An Interview with the President of VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans

Dr. Hany Abdelaal talks about CHOICE's new plan offerings and the challenge of managing care for members with complex needs.



Over the past several years, CHOICE has emerged as a leader in New York's quality ratings with its Managed Long Term Care and Medicaid Advantage Plus (MAP) health plans, while its SelectHealth special needs plan has set the pace in helping members manage HIV successfully. In addition, CHOICE recently announced that it will offer two new Medicare plans for 2022. VNSNY Today spoke with Dr. Abdelaal about CHOICE's current and future direction.

You have over 25,000 members in your three existing plans—CHOICE MLTC, CHOICE Total MAP plan, and CHOICE SelectHealth. What prompted CHOICE to offer two new Medicare plans for 2022?

Let me start by saying that this is an exciting time at CHOICE. We've made significant investments over the past five years on our infrastructure, our technology and, most importantly, our staff. Today we have outstanding bench strength, and we've developed a culture where everyone knows exactly what our strategy is. Our new plan offerings reflect these achievements. We've shown we can manage care for even our highest-need members in a cost-effective, sustainable way, and this has created an opportunity to expand our offerings.

How do you effectively manage the care of your high-need members?

Close collaboration between payors and providers is really the key. One way we've developed this is through internal partnerships, since VNSNY has a large provider business. For example, we're working with VNSNY's Care Management Organization (CMO) to coordinate care for a thousand of our highest-need CHOICE Total members. And we're also teaming with the CMO and VNSNY's Business Analytics team to link our members with the CMO's Advanced Illness Management program, which was created to support people in the later stages of illness.

Are you able to use this same care management model with providers outside VNSNY?

Absolutely. Over the years we've built very close relationships with our providers in the community. We know that if we can implement high-touch approaches for members with complex needs, using a combination of remote monitoring and in-person interventions, we can provide better care at lower cost. To accomplish this, we need providers who have boots on the ground, and who can

work with us to implement the latest technologies and population health methods, including a strong focus on areas like social determinants of health and family dynamics. Most of all, though, everybody has to be on the same team. We need providers that we want to work with, and who have the same mission alignment and want to work with our members.

Where do the new CHOICE products fit into this model?

They'll be based on that same close payor-provider relationship, designed to deliver high-touch, high-quality care. One of the new plans is for people who have both Medicare and Medicaid. Our other new product is Medicare only, but geared to lower-income individuals. We're marketing the two new plans together with CHOICE Total as a "family" of plans that will work as a continuum, enabling members to stay with us as they age and when their income changes.

A number of CHOICE staff are in the process of shifting to VNSNY's new Management Services Organization, which launches in January 2022. Why did you spin off this group?

It's really a sign of our success. Our administrative expertise has progressed to where we want to offer it to other plans on a contract basis through a stand-alone Management Services Organization, or MSO—so we've created a structure that lets us do that. Meanwhile, CHOICE will continue to manage the health of the members in our own plans, providing the comprehensive, member-centered services we're known for.

CHOICE to Offer Two New Medicare Plans for 2022

VNSNY CHOICE Health Plans has announced it will be offering two new Medicare plan products for 2022, including one for people with both Medicare and Medicaid. Specifics on the benefits provided by these plans will be available starting in October, 2021. We encourage *VNSNY Today* readers to visit the VNSNY CHOICE website at the beginning of October to learn more about the new products. That website address is: vnsnychoice.org. “We’re excited about these new offerings,” notes Dr. Hany Abdelaal, President of VNSNY CHOICE, “and we look forward to supplying additional information about them in the weeks to come.”

Partners in Care Seeks Solutions to Home Health Aide Shortage

Between America's aging population and seniors' growing preference to receive care at home due to COVID-19, demand for home health aides (HHAs) is soaring. In response, Partners in Care, VNSNY's licensed home care services agency, has been ramping up its HHA recruitment efforts while also supporting legislation that would provide government funding to boost HHA wages—viewed as a key step in combatting the chronic shortage of HHA workers nationwide.

"We held a series of HHA hiring events in New York's five boroughs and the surrounding counties in July and August, which resulted in our hiring nearly 100 new HHAs," says James Rolla, Senior Vice President of Partners in Care. While these additions to its 6,000-plus HHA workforce are welcome, says Rolla, recruiting remains a challenge. "Partners in Care provides excellent benefits to our HHAs, including health insurance, a pension plan, and flexible work schedules," he says. "Still, it's not an easy marketplace as far as hiring is concerned."

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated America's HHA shortage, notes Rolla, by increasing demand for in-home care. Along with other healthcare experts, he agrees that one important piece of the solution is to find a sustainable way to raise HHAs' base pay.

"Ultimately, that means raising government reimbursement rates for HHA care," says Rolla. "Fortunately, officials are starting to realize this approach will actually save money in the long run. Insurers are recognizing that when their clients don't get the care they need at home, they end up in the hospital."

In pursuit of this goal, VNSNY is putting its full support behind the proposed Better Care Better Jobs Act, now before both houses of Congress. This legislation contains \$400 billion in federal funding for home-based care, including increased wages for HHAs and other care providers. In July, Rolla addressed a rally at New York City Hall in support of the bill—the only representative of a home care organization invited to do so. In addition, hundreds of VNSNY staff members have contacted their U.S. Senators as part of a grass-roots lobbying push.

"If we want to keep people safe at home and control overall spending on health care, we must invest in our HHAs," adds Rolla. "In the long term, this includes higher wages. It also means moving away from our current assignment-based per diem model towards a steady, guaranteed income while also developing a career ladder for HHAs, so people see it as a viable career option."



Teaming with the 1199 union to support higher HHA wages: On July 13th, VNSNY and Partners in Care joined nearly 2,000 home care workers at a Manhattan rally organized by 1199SEIU to support the \$400 billion Better Care Better Jobs Act. The legislation, now before Congress, includes funding to raise the wages of home health aides. VNSNY Partners in Care Senior Vice President James Rolla (pictured above with Partners in Care HHAs at the rally) was the only home care organization leader to address the gathering.

VNSNY to Develop Mental Health Services for Health Insurers

After 35 years of delivering grant-based mental health care to vulnerable New Yorkers where they live—from on-the-spot interventions for adults and children in crisis to in-home treatment for depressed seniors—VNSNY’s Community Mental Health Services (CMHS) is looking to significantly expand its reach by serving a new set of customers: health insurers.

This planned expansion is being led by the new head of CMHS, Senior Vice President Jessica Fear. “Our goal is to serve more people in need, and do this in a financially sustainable way,” says Ms. Fear. “This means working with insurers. While our safety-net programs will remain a key part of the CMHS portfolio, we’re also looking to develop services and products that health plans will find valuable for their members.”

Upon assuming leadership of CMHS in April, Ms. Fear led a strategic planning process that identified five key product areas CMHS will focus on going forward: substance use services (“an area where we have deep expertise that’s underutilized right now,” she notes); children’s services; geriatric services; integrated care—working with medical providers to care for people’s physical health and their emotional and mental well-being in tandem; and tele-behavioral health.

“Until recently, tele-behavioral health has struggled to get off the ground,” Ms. Fear explains, “but it came into its own with the pandemic. In fact, we found that virtual visits produced better outcomes for many of our clients who find it hard to keep appointments in person. During the pandemic, when we connected with clients at home by phone or video, our no-show rate dropped dramatically. We’re certainly going back out into the field much more now—but going forward, we want to have telehealth as a tool in our toolkit.”



One of the ways VNSNY’s Community Mental Health Services (CMHS) is looking to expand its reach is by developing new programs and products for children, families and adults served by health plans. “Our goal is to serve more people in need, and do this in a financially sustainable way,” says CMHS head Jessica Fear.

Integration of medical and behavioral health care is another approach Ms. Fear believes will only grow. “The data shows that the cost of caring for someone medically goes up several-fold if they have behavioral health issues that aren’t addressed,” she says. “VNSNY has extensive experience caring for both physical and mental health, so that’s an area where we can add real value.”

VNSNY Offers Customized Support for LGBTQ+ Patients



With its enterprise-wide LGBTQ+ cultural competency training and its strong links to LGBTQ+ advocacy groups in the community, VNSNY has long been a leader in providing health care and related services to LGBTQ+ New Yorkers. Now the organization is taking its leadership role a step further by introducing the LGBTQ+ Care Type Model.

When patients, members and clients who have self-identified as LGBTQ+ are referred to VNSNY's care, they're placed in VNSNY's LGBTQ+ Program. LGBTQ+ Manager Arthur Fitting then reviews their current health status with them and assists in evaluating which LGBTQ+ health screening and LGBTQ+ health education they may need.

Similarly, when the patient is ready for discharge, VNSNY will assess their needs and their knowledge of available LGBTQ+ community services, and link them to resources as appropriate. Fitting's role also includes supporting VNSNY clinical and frontline staff by providing LGBTQ+ health education and cultural competency information when needed.

"Our goal is to provide the highest quality of care and wellness for New York's almost 800,000 LGBTQ+ population," says Fitting. "The LGBTQ+ Care Type lets us collect and review different aspects of a patient's health to understand how we can best support their person-centered care. It also allows us to start identifying which health care disparities our LGBTQ+ patients may be experiencing and assist with corrective measures."

Fitting stresses that the model will only be employed on request. "This is one more way to let New York's LGBTQ+ community know that VNSNY is committed to their health and wellness," he says.

VNSNY Helps Lower Barriers to Hospice Care

VNSNY's HOPE Program is addressing disparities in access to end-of-life care in Harlem and the Bronx.

"Are you the lady that's going to get me home?" asked Carlos* from his hospital bed in Harlem Hospital. After spending 65 days in two hospitals for various illnesses, returning to his Brooklyn residence had begun to feel like a hopeless quest. But Ruthlyn Marrett, a nurse liaison with VNSNY Hospice's HOPE program, had explained to Carlos's family that home hospice allows even the sickest patients to be cared for in their own homes, surrounded by their loved ones.

Within hours after the family agreed to enroll Carlos in VNSNY Hospice, Marrett arranged for a hospital bed and other medical equipment to be installed in his apartment and assigned him a VNSNY care team that included a nurse, doctor, social worker, and spiritual care counselor. Besides caring for Carlos, the team would help his wife, Iris, and their family manage Carlos's symptoms and navigate the complexities of end-of-life care.

"We walked them through every step," Marrett says. "I also told Iris she could call me anytime—and I'm glad to say she's taken me up on that."

Addressing health disparities has always been part of VNSNY's mission, dating back to founder Lillian Wald's work with impoverished immigrants in lower Manhattan. Today, that mission includes a range of VNSNY programs that are improving healthcare access for first-time mothers, low-income adults and children with mental health issues, LGBTQ+ individuals, military veterans, and other underserved populations.

As Carlos's story illustrates, the HOPE Program is addressing another major—yet often overlooked—disparity: the underutilization of hospice services by Black and Latinx Americans. While 48% of white Medicare beneficiaries enroll in hospice at end of life, only 8% of Black and 6% of Latinx on Medicare use hospice services—even though Medicare covers its cost in full. This disparity means that millions of terminally ill Americans aren't receiving the expert emotional support and pain management in a home setting that hospice offers.



Over the past 18 months, VNSNY Hospice's HOPE Program has enrolled over 1,300 hospice patients in some of New York City's poorest zip codes. The program's strategy includes reaching out to local hospitals, community organizations and religious groups to educate residents and local "influencers" on the benefits of hospice care and dispel common misconceptions.

Led by Michelle Drayton, Director of the HOPE Program, VNSNY is working to close that gap. Over the past 18 months, Marrett and her fellow liaisons have enrolled over 1,300 hospice patients in the program's target regions, which include some of New York City's poorest zip codes. After starting in Harlem, HOPE recently expanded to the Bronx with the support of a \$500,000 grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation. The program is using the same strategy in that borough that it's followed in upper Manhattan, reaching out to local hospitals, community organizations and religious groups to educate residents and local "influencers" on the benefits of hospice care and dispel common misconceptions.

VNSNY Hospice's cultural competency training for HOPE and VNSNY staff is also instrumental in providing clinicians with insights and knowledge on how cultural influences affect patients' decisions to enter into hospice. "Our staff's understanding of the people and culture in Harlem and the Bronx is what allows us to connect with residents and explain what hospice is really about," notes Drayton. "In the end, breaking down barriers is a matter of trust, and that's what we're working to build."

** The patient's name has been changed for privacy.*

VNSNY Joins Other Essential Workers in NYC Heroes Parade

“We went and did things other people thought were impossible.”

“As a home health aide, I am proud that I could have an impact on so many.”

“I learned a lot about myself over the last 15 months, finding a courage I didn’t necessarily know I had.”

These were just some of the comments from the VNSNY field staff who participated in New York City’s “Hometown Heroes” Parade on July 7th. The event—the first parade through downtown Manhattan’s Canyon of Heroes in over two years—honored New York’s essential workers for their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. Health care employees, transportation workers, food service professionals, and other groups gathered for what’s being called one of the largest ticker-tape parades in the city’s history.

In addition to being cheered on by thousands of spectators, VNSNY staff marching in the parade were featured prominently in TV, radio and print coverage of the event, including video segments on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe* and CNBC’s national show *The News with Shepard Smith*. To a person, they say it’s a day they’ll never forget.

“Marching in the parade was an honor, especially representing VNSNY,” said Partners in Care home health aide Denise Mallette. “Seeing the community of New York City show love to us was very emotional.”

“The gratitude I felt is inexpressible,” agreed fellow marcher Eileen Baez, a nurse with VNSNY Home Care. “I spent half the time crying happy tears, seeing how New York appreciated us.”

On July 7th, in what’s being called one of the largest ticker-tape parades in New York City’s history, health care employees and other essential workers were honored for their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic. VNSNY staff members marching in the parade were featured prominently in TV, radio and print coverage of the event.

