VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION OF UTICA AND ONEIDA COUNTY

100 YEARS OF CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY

A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF THE VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION OF UTICA AND ONEIDA COUNTY
FOR 100 YEARS, THE VISITING NURSE ASSOCIATION OF UTICA AND ONEIDA COUNTY HAS BEEN CARING FOR OUR COMMUNITY’S HEALTHCARE NEEDS IN THE COMFORT OF PATIENTS’ HOMES AND NEIGHBORHOODS.

Our founders believed they could create positive change by working together to address Utica’s public health needs. They may never have imagined that their outreach efforts would eventually grow into a robust organization serving thousands of patients every year.

In 2015, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County celebrates its centennial anniversary. Although the organization has been known by many names and undergone numerous changes in the past 100 years, it has never wavered in its commitment to provide high quality care to patients.
THE EARLY DAYS

Temperatures neared 100 degrees on the July day in 1912 when a small group of women met in the home of Sophia Crouse, a prominent member of Utica’s society, at 515 Genesee Street to discuss what they could do about the alarmingly high infant death rate in Utica.

In the first six months of 1912, nearly 250 babies out of every 1,000 born had died. This rate was so significant it received national scrutiny from the Children’s Bureau in Washington, D.C., and even surpassed the number of infant deaths seen in New York City at the time.

These dedicated women formed the Committee on Child Welfare (later to become the Baby Welfare Committee of Utica) of the Municipal League of Utica and went to work to reduce the number of infant deaths — and they did just that.

On July 10, 1912, a Babies’ Pure Milk and Health Station was opened in the basement of the Brandegee School on Jay Street in Utica and kept open during the hot summer months. The stations provided not only fresh milk for infants, but prenatal and postnatal counseling and information for young mothers on feeding babies, making infant clothes and how to keep children healthy.

Crouse and her group were able to gain the confidence of young mothers and through their health teaching were able to reduce the infant mortality in Utica to less than 100 out of every 1,000 births by 1920.

During that time, as many as 300 to 400 clinics were conducted annually and more than 7,000 citizens attended. Clinic stations were set up in West Utica, East Utica and Downtown. The success of the clinics and stations led to permanent health stations opening in 1913 and from this small beginning the Committee’s work continued to grow.

In 1915, the City of Utica appropriated $1,000 to support the work being done through the stations. Previously, they had been supported entirely through private donations, all of which helped to bring highly beneficial services to immigrants and young mothers with families in need.

Overseeing the three clinic’s operations and a staff of five physicians was Dr. T. Wood Clarke, who served as medical director of the Baby Welfare Committee for 16 years.

Dr. T. Wood Clarke was born and raised in Utica. He attended Harvard University and went on to Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Following graduation, he furthered his medical training at Johns Hopkins Hospital and Lakeside Hospital in Cleveland, Ohio, as well as internationally in Berlin, Germany, and London, England. Clarke’s impressive career included work with the Rockefeller Institute of Medical Research, as well as prolific writing on topics related to medicine and local history.
Home visits by nurses were an important part of the outreach provided to young mothers. Thousands of home visits were made the first year, including visits to every baby born in Utica soon after their birth. Nurses made at least one call to inquire about the baby’s health and to explain the services offered by the Baby Welfare Committee. In 1919, the community’s first visiting nurse was appointed with a salary paid for by a friend of the Committee. In the years that followed, the concept of a visiting nurse would gain popularity and the number employed locally would increase.

As the years went by, the Baby Welfare Committee identified other medical concerns it could address, including infantile paralysis, typhoid fever and smallpox, and it began working as an affiliate of the Utica Dispensary.

To bring all bedside nursing services in the community together, the Utica Dispensary created a group known as the Visiting Nurse Association in 1925. The Baby Welfare Committee and the Visiting Nurse Association worked hand in hand at the clinics and as a result of their close association chose to consolidate efforts. On December 6, 1928, the Baby Welfare Committee changed its name to Utica Visiting Nurse and Child Welfare Association, Inc. The new organization was focused on coordinating nursing activities for Utica, more efficiently providing nursing care in the home and increasing the health and vitality of Utica’s children through health education.

AN ORGANIZATION IS BORN

On June 15, 1915, the Baby Welfare Committee of Utica incorporated and the earliest roots of the present-day Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County were planted.
AN ERA OF CHANGE

The 1930s and 1940s brought about significant change for the newly formed Association. Long-time president Sophia Crouse retired in 1934 after 21 years of dedicated service.

At that time she was recognized for taking it upon herself to implement her vision for a healthier community. She grew a program from very humble beginnings to one of the most outstanding public health projects in Utica’s history.

The work of the Utica Visiting Nurse and Child Welfare Association continued amid the struggles of the Great Depression. In 1934, the Association entered into contracts with St. Elizabeth’s Hospital and Faxton Hospital to bring on senior nursing students for affiliations ranging from five weeks to two months. The next year, the organization began providing daily checkup services to nursery schools, with more than seven schools participating in the program by 1943.

In 1947, Utica’s Public Health Department assumed responsibility for maternal and child health services, which led to the reorganization of the Utica Visiting Nurse and Child Welfare Association. On September 30, 1947, the organization officially became the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica, Inc. and exclusively provided bedside nursing.

As a result of this narrowed scope of work, student affiliations with the local hospitals were discontinued and nursery school checkups became the responsibility of the city’s Public Health Department, leading to a decrease in staffing at the newly formed organization.
in 1960, the idea for a meal delivery program was proposed and the concept gained momentum after a 1962 study determined that well over 100 community members were in immediate need of such a service. Meals on Wheels began operating on January 20, 1964, at Faxton Hospital with an operating cost of less than $2 per day per client. By the end of its first year, more than 2,800 meals were prepared and delivered thanks to the generous support of more than 250 volunteers who contributed 1,500 hours of service. In 1975, the Meals on Wheels program began working in conjunction with the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica, a relationship that would last well into the next century.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation creating Medicaid and Medicare programs in July 1965, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica experienced a rejuvenation due to increased reimbursement for services. The agency became a Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) approved through New York State (NYS), qualified to provide services to this new patient population. In the years that followed, the organization added physical, occupational and speech therapy services through a contract with Children’s Hospital and began a training program for home health aides. When home health aide services were launched in 1968, aides earned a starting wage of $1.75 per hour and grew to account for nearly half of the Association’s staff within just one year.

In June 1977, the present-day Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County was created when NYS approved the organization to serve all of Oneida County. To handle the increased staffing, the agency moved to the CAG Building, the former St. Luke’s Hospital, at 1506 Whitesboro Street.

**MEALS ON WHEELS CHAMPION**

In 1995, Mrs. Nellie Daly was recognized by the NYS Legislature for “Outstanding Contribution by a Senior Citizen” for her many years of work developing and building the Greater Utica Area Meals on Wheels Program. Mrs. Daly was involved with the initial implementation of the program in the 1960s until her retirement in 1995.

**SERVICE EXPANSION**

Many programs and services were added to the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica’s offerings during the 1960s and 1970s to supplement bedside nursing care.

In 1960, the idea for a meal delivery program was proposed and the concept gained momentum after a 1962 study determined that well over 100 community members were in immediate need of such a service. Meals on Wheels began operating on January 20, 1964, at Faxton Hospital with an operating cost of less than $2 per day per client. By the end of its first year, more than 2,800 meals were prepared and delivered thanks to the generous support of more than 250 volunteers who contributed 1,500 hours of service. In 1975, the Meals on Wheels program began working in conjunction with the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica, a relationship that would last well into the next century.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson signed legislation creating Medicaid and Medicare programs in July 1965, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica experienced a rejuvenation due to increased reimbursement for services. The agency became a Certified Home Health Agency (CHHA) approved through New York State (NYS), qualified to provide services to this new patient population. In the years that followed, the organization added physical, occupational and speech therapy services through a contract with Children’s Hospital and began a training program for home health aides. When home health aide services were launched in 1968, aides earned a starting wage of $1.75 per hour and grew to account for nearly half of the Association’s staff within just one year.

In June 1977, the present-day Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County was created when NYS approved the organization to serve all of Oneida County. To handle the increased staffing, the agency moved to the CAG Building, the former St. Luke’s Hospital, at 1506 Whitesboro Street.
PREPARING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

NYS Senator Tarky Lombardi initiated long-term health care programs with the passage of legislation in 1978 under the NYS Medicaid Program.

These programs integrated a network of health, social and environmental services in an organized plan to meet the needs of individuals with chronic disabilities to ensure that they are assisted in remaining functionally independent in their own communities.

Just four years later, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County received state approval to launch their own long-term health care program, a “nursing home without walls,” to care for patients.

The 1980s proved to be a busy decade for the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County. The first guild contract had been passed just before the dawn of the 80s, the agency moved to new quarters at 401 Columbia Street in 1984 and by the end of the decade they installed their first computer.

The 1990s and the years that followed, although no less busy, would be defined by affiliations. In 1989, the VNS of the Mohawk Valley Inc. was established to serve as the non-profit parent corporation of the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County and Visiting Nurse Home Services, Inc. Visiting Nurse Home Services opened in April 1991 as a non-profit licensed home care agency to meet increasing patient needs for non-traditional services such as private duty nursing, licensed practical nurse and home health aide services. They worked together with the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County to provide a comprehensive program allowing more individuals to maintain their independence.

At the turn of the century, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County affiliated with Mohawk Valley Network—a relationship that would transform the organization in the years to come.
Office of the Caring Community

CHAP ACCREDITATION
The Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County maintains their accreditation as a CHHA through CHAP, an independent, nonprofit accrediting body for home and community-based health care organizations. Created in 1965 as a joint venture between the American Public Health Association and the National League for Nursing, CHAP was the first accrediting body for home and community-based health care organizations in the United States.

CHAP accredits more than 9,000 sites with a purpose to define and advance the highest quality of community-based care. Through authority granted by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), CHAP has the regulatory authority to survey agencies providing home health, hospice and home medical equipment services to determine if they meet the Medicare Conditions of Participation and CMS Quality Standards.

Mohawk Valley Network was the parent organization of Faxton Hospital and St. Luke’s-Memorial, who had begun working together in 1992.

In the years leading up to 2000, the organizations had combined governing boards, management teams and with the birth of a new millennium, consolidation was complete with the creation of Faxton St. Luke’s Healthcare (FSLH) — a combined healthcare system.

Now an affiliate of the system, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County enjoyed much success, including the launch of TeleHealth services in 2002 and accreditation through the Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP) in 2005 — a designation they hold to this day.

In 2009, the management structure for all of FSLH’s home care affiliates — Mohawk Valley Home Care, Senior Network Health and the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County — was consolidated to improve efficiency and collaboration in the delivery of home care services to the community.

The goal of improved collaboration was realized when FSLH received a $31.3 million grant from NYS to improve long-term care services and consolidate community-based alternatives for Oneida County residents in September 2010. For the first time, all home care service entities would be housed in a single facility — the Center for Rehabilitation and Continuing Care Services — which opened in January 2013 on the St. Luke’s Campus.

During this time, FSLH also began exploring an affiliation with St. Elizabeth Medical Center (SEMC) and in March 2014 officially announced their affiliation as the Mohawk Valley Health System (MVHS). Now an affiliate of MVHS, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County continues to provide Oneida County residents with much needed services that allow them to maintain their independence and live safely in the comfort of their home environment.

In early 2015, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County entered into a management contract with St. Elizabeth Home Care, SEMC’s home health care agency, to share services between the two Certified Home Health Agencies.

Celebrating 100 Years

Caring for Our Community | 15
Driving a car to patients’ homes, using computers to record patient information or monitoring a patient remotely with TeleHealth technology would have been unimaginable. Although much has changed over the last 100 years, our mission to provide high quality, compassionate care to patients in need has remained steadfast. Today, the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County serves nearly 2,200 patients annually and made more than 63,000 home visits in 2014 with more than 21,000 TeleHealth patient transmissions and assessments.

The Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County provides patients living in Oneida County with compassionate care and resources that are specially selected by a team of physicians, nurses, case managers and therapists. Whether a patient is recovering from surgery or needs help managing a chronic illness, we offer and help coordinate these quality services:

- Advanced wound care
- Case management
- Chronic disease management
- High-tech home IV therapy
- Home health aides
- Home TeleHealth technology
- Medical social workers
- Therapy, including physical, occupational, speech, respiratory and nutritional

Today’s visiting nurses do much more than make neighborhood rounds and provide bedside care — they are highly trained professionals committed to promoting our community’s well-being and independence through expertise, education and support. As the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County celebrates its 100th anniversary, we celebrate our caregivers who keep our patients healthy, safe and vibrant, and look forward to the next 100 years of serving our community.

Sophia Crouse and the early supporters of the Baby Welfare Committee could never have imagined the legacy they would leave or how home care nursing would change over the next century.

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF HOME CARE NURSING

If you ask Anthony Burnett, RN, a home care nurse with the Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County, about home care nursing, he’ll say “it’s more than just a career.”

“More health care facilities are sending patients home earlier to recover, requiring patients to be involved in caring for themselves,” Burnett explains. “That’s where we can help.”

While every nurse needs to have the knowledge and skills to care for patients, it’s their care, commitment and compassion that guide them. This is especially evident in home care. Home care nurses bring individualized medical attention to each patient in their home environment. This is a care model that benefits patients, families and nurses alike.

“Being a home care nurse is beautiful,” said Burnett. “You get to focus on one patient at a time and you work independently with the patient and their family to achieve the best possible outcome.”

The primary responsibility of a home care nurse is to help patients continue to live in their homes. Visiting nurse services help limit costly hospital stays that can be physically, emotionally and financially burdensome for patients and their families. Home care reaches patients ways to become more independent and better able to support their own medical needs.

“You need to be a people person because you deal with the patients in a holistic way,” said Burnett. “This means working within the physical limitations of the home environment, including the kids, the dog and the cat. Every patient is unique and learns differently. Finding ways to meet their needs is what makes home care nursing so challenging and rewarding.”

“Tony is my angel,” said Gloria Ambruso, one of Burnett’s patients. “He has helped me with leg exercises so I can get around my house easier. He’s a joy to have around. I consider him to be one of my grandsons.”

Although administering care in the home requires a great deal of autonomy and independence, nurses have a strong support system within the agency. “With every challenge, whether it is language barriers, dealing with pets or adapting to the limitations of the home environment, there are amazing interpreters, case managers, social workers and other nurses at Visiting Nurse Association of Utica and Oneida County that are always available for guidance and support,” said Ellis.

For Burnett, being a home care nurse is what he loves to do. “It’s the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done,” he notes.
THANK YOU TO OUR ANNIVERSARY SPONSORS!

sodexo

Ed*Ed

MEDLINE

SelectData