



*A History
of Caring and
Community*



VISITING NURSE SERVICE &
HOSPICE OF SUFFOLK, INC.

Thursday, October 4, 2012

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We are indebted to our founders, not only for what they did in 1952, establishing the original Visiting Nurse Service of Huntington Township at a time when the community itself was its only source of support, but also for having the foresight to record its early history for us to appreciate in celebration of this 60th anniversary.

H. Stuart Ortloff, the first President of the volunteer Board of Trustees, captured the early history of the organization from 1952 through 1966, at which time the Medicare benefit was written into the Social Security law and provided a payment source to meet the rapidly growing community need.

H. Stuart Ortloff's recorded history as he lived it follows in these pages, and is augmented with photos and subsequent history to bring us to the present.

Today we are indebted to the countless volunteers and staff that followed in the footsteps of our founders, all of whom remained steadfast in their commitment to a mission of service and dedicated to the promotion of health for the individual, family and community.

Special thanks to Jamie Petretti who tirelessly researched library sources, newspaper archives, and on-line files to compile this combined account and time line of VNS history that follows.

Special thanks also to VNSHS staff Barbara Sorelle and Hillary Hoffman for planning the 60 year celebration, including the slide show of nostalgic photos and congratulatory wishes from our friends and supporters.

Robert Cogliati, President
Visiting Nurse Service & Hospice of Suffolk, Inc. - 2012

“Time is not of the clock or the calendar in these days, but of the essence. No one has it to spare, but there is an art in using it. The nursing profession, which is the art of caring for the sick and preventing illness, thus promoting health, is one of the greatest arts and the most valuable use of time in this scientific age. The growth of the Visiting Nurse Service is but a reflection of the universal growth in the demand for more and better health services.”

**H. Stuart Ortloff, Founding President
Visiting Nurse Service of Huntington Township, Inc. - 1952**

PRIOR TO INCORPORATION



In 1920, just after World War I, visiting nurses were needed in the Township of Huntington. Many veterans were returning home, those killed may have left families behind, and many people just needed help. Therefore, the Huntington Branch of the Suffolk County Chapter of the American Red Cross recommended and fostered the work of visiting nurses. Several years later, the Cold Spring Harbor and Northport branches of the Red Cross joined in such work as home nursing, clinics, and a certain amount of work in the schools. Several nurses were employed and the work was authorized and supported by the Red Cross Branches, the Town of Huntington and some private contributions. Due to the start of World War II in 1941, the increase in the duties and obligations of the Red Cross necessitated the withdrawal of their financial support. The great demands on the time of volunteers, and the pressing need of contributions to the war causes, made it difficult to continue and the work was abandoned.

Following World War II, there was a feeling that Huntington should have a Visiting Nurse Association. In 1947, the Service League of Huntington Township formed a committee under the chairmanship of Mr. H. Stuart Ortloff to discuss the matter. The National Organization for Public Health Nursing was called in to make a survey of the situation, under the auspices of the hospitals of the county. Its recommendation was that a Visiting Nurse Association should be organized but on a countywide basis. The committee felt that this was too difficult an undertaking at that time and no progress was made.

After waiting two years, the Service League made another survey in February 1949, among the various doctors, the hospital and other interested groups in Huntington Township. This survey showed that there was an overwhelming need for a local organization, but financial support was very difficult to obtain.

THE BEGINNING



n November 21, 1951, Dr. Philip Raffle, Commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Health, called a meeting, and in spite of all the difficulties, the Visiting Nurses Association of Huntington Township was organized. It became incorporated on March 11, 1952. John Toaz prepared and filed the incorporation papers, which were signed by H. Stuart Ortloff, Earl Rubini, a local representative of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, Paul Fleming, representing Huntington Hospital, Mrs. E. Jannicky, representing the Service League, and Mrs. Ralph Donnell, representing the Junior Welfare League of Huntington. The first office was located at 375 New York Avenue in Huntington.

At the first Annual Meeting of the Association held on May 13, 1952, the following officers were elected: H. Stuart Ortloff, President; Mrs. Carl de Ganahl, 1st Vice President; Mrs. William Bradford, 2nd Vice President; Mrs. Orland Esval, Treasurer; Earl Rubini, Secretary.



November 21, 1951 meeting to discuss VNA becoming an incorporation.

In order to help support the association, a membership fundraising campaign was held by mail. In addition, the Tuberculosis and Public Health Association of Suffolk County donated \$3,000 toward the support of the new organization.

Mrs. Ralph Donnell was appointed the Chairman of a Membership Committee and Miss Mabel Hilcken was made Acting Treasurer. Dr. Anthony Firenze headed a Doctor's Committee, which decided that the nurses should work only under the direction of attending physicians. This committee also served in an advisory capacity to the proposed nursing staff.

It was felt that Huntington did not need a strictly charitable nursing service, and a set scale of fees based on ability to pay was decided upon with a maximum of \$2.50 for the first hour and \$.50 for each additional half hour. However, free care was also given to those who could not afford this service.

Miss Dorothy Carter, charter member of the Visiting Nurse Association, was appointed staff to help keep records. Since the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was planning to discontinue its own nursing service to its policy holders at this time, they offered to transfer their nurse, Miss Clementine Hilbert, to the VNA as of July 1, 1952, and agreed to pay her salary until January 1, 1953. Miss Hilbert quickly established relations with the community, and it was soon evident that a second nurse was needed. The Tuberculosis and Public Health Association made a further grant for this purpose.

With the support of a small number of members and a few organizations as well as the nurses' fees, the Association continued to keep going until 1954. A proposition was placed before the voters in the Town Election of 1953 asking for Town Support. This referendum was passed, and since the time the Town has partially reimbursed the Association for charitable cases. A contract was also arranged with Suffolk County Department of Public Welfare to help pay, with the Veterans Administration and the Suffolk County Cancer Society covering service to their clients in the Township of Huntington.

Because of the need for greater office space, in 1958 the VNA secured new quarters on the second floor at 304 Main Street in Huntington, NY. The following year, Board Members Mrs. Robert Gilmore and Mrs. Richard James established the Budget Shop which proved to be a success and brought in additional income for the Association.



Miss C. Hilbert making her first house call in 1952.

In 1962, the Visiting Nurse Association voted to become a participating member of the United Fund of Huntington Township, thus assuring a more stable income. In that same year, the Association also became a member of the Federation of VNA's of Nassau County to discuss common problems of administration. Also in 1962, Helen Strobl joined VNS as Supervisor of Nurses and Director.

In 1964, the Association, with the endorsement of Mrs. Gilmore, moved to 377A New York Avenue in Huntington in order to secure more office space. Now though, it was able to rent the entire building, which had been recently renovated with the Budget Shop on the ground floor, an attractive entrance, and rooms upstairs for the nurses' offices.

ANOTHER STEP FORWARD - AMALGAMATION



Signing the papers to unite VNA with Suffolk County Dept of Health, 1965.



about this time the possibility of amalgamating with the Suffolk County Department of Health presented itself, and a committee of the VNA was appointed to study the situation and take it up with the Health Department. This would allow for a much broader basis of nursing and health services to local communities than had been previously provided. Also, the recent advent of Medicare and its implication for all medical services to patients made it imperative that some action be taken by VNA.

As a result of this study, and after much consultation with Dr. Michael Buscemi, Mr. Lawrence Wright and Miss Marian Petraske, of the Health Department, a satisfactory agreement was reached and the step was finally taken in October 1965. H. Lee Dennison, Executive of Suffolk County, and Mrs. Robert N. Gilmore, President of the Visiting Nurse Association of Huntington signed the agreement which was to become effective on January 1, 1966.



Helen Strobl with VNS nurses, 1965.

With this amalgamation, the Visiting Nurse Association changed its name to Visiting Nurse Service, although it still maintained its own identity, officers, Board of Directors, and budget and was still responsible for raising some of its funds to help carry on the program. It paid full salaries for 4 to 6 nurses. In addition, a certain number of Public Health nurses from Health Department staff were assigned to the office at 377A New York Avenue. Mrs. Helen Strobl, Director-Supervisor of the Visiting Nurse Association since 1962 was retained as Director-Supervisor of the combined services, thus making for greater coordination of work.

An added incentive for taking this step at this time was that Visiting Nurse Service would thereby become an accredited agency of the New York State Department of Health, and thus became eligible for participating in the Medicare program, when it started on July 1, 1966. Also, the Visiting Nurse Service could call on the Health Department for consultation service in some of its specialties, such as orthopedic and rehabilitation work, which the VNA had not previously offered.

Since Huntington was the only Township in Suffolk County that had a Visiting Nurse Service, it was hoped that it would serve as a "Pilot

Study” that would extend to other towns in the county. While many details still remained to be worked out, there was every reason to believe that it was on the right track, and that Huntington was proud of the contribution its Visiting Nurse Service was making to the welfare of its citizens.

Even with Medicare and help from the United Fund and Town Board, steadily mounting costs rested heavily upon its budget. Its many free patients often had greater needs than those who could afford to pay. In order to help raise money, Visiting Nurse Service started hosting the Tour of Houses and the Horse Show as well as other benefit events.

VISITING NURSE SERVICE, INC.



n order to accommodate the growing population and services, as well as the combined staff of Visiting Nurse Service coordinated with staff assigned by the Health Department, Visiting Nurse Service moved again to 52 Elm Street in Huntington while the Budget Shop united with the Community Thrift Shop and moved to 8 Carver Street in Huntington.

After ten years at that location however, on March 2, 1978 the Elm Street office was destroyed by a fire along with all the patient and billing records. The nursing staff continued to make daily visits, caring for their patients while the office staff worked to reconstruct the billing system.

In the meantime, Visiting Nurse Service was temporarily housed next door at the Visiting Homemaker Service until a few months later, when it relocated to 125 West Hills Road in Huntington Station. With foresight and careful planning, the Board, led by President Virginia Stevens, opted to purchase the building as an investment in the future of the agency.

In 1980, Helen Strobl retired and Linda Taylor assumed the post of Executive Director. The eighties brought significant growth and



*Linda Taylor,
RN, BSN, MA
Chief Executive Officer
VNSHS*

change in the provision of home health care. Visits increased from under 10,000 a year in 1966 to over 100,000 a year during the 90's as services increased in type and number and related rehabilitative therapies and home health aide care were added to the established nursing service. Service area was also expanded beyond Huntington Township in response to the originally identified need for a countywide service.

Medicare added the benefit of hospice care as distinct from and in addition to the existing home care benefit. Since Visiting Nurse Service had a tradition and history of caring for all patients, including those with terminal illness, it was a logical expansion of their service to become a Medicare provider of Hospice care and a natural extension of what they already did. Visiting Nurse Service thus submitted their application to the New York State Health Department and subsequently received approval as a Certified Hospice in 1989. With the addition of Hospice and corresponding increased staff for continued growth, Linda Taylor and VNS Board President Marilyn Cunniff met with Mary Cray and Joan Woods, Board member and Executive Director respectively, of St. Johnland Nursing Home in Kings Park. Together they facilitated the use of supplemental office space by Visiting Nurse Service staff on the grounds of St. Johnland. This was done rent free in the spirit of cooperative community service and afforded Visiting Nurse Service additional stability as it developed the hospice program.

In July of 1991, Visiting Nurse Service and Hospice of Suffolk moved to 505 Main Street in Northport combining the Huntington Station location with the Kings Park location. The agency sold the Huntington Station building and, with the help of volunteer Jay Walsh, negotiated an agreement to rent the 505 Main Street building with an option to buy. This proved to be a valuable investment in the continued future and stability of the agency, and in subsequent years Visiting Nurse Service exercised the option and completed the purchase of the office building.



Open house reception to celebrate new offices at 505 Main Street in Northport.

In the nineties there continued to be rapid growth of utilization of all health care services and Medicare expenses grew to pay for that utilization. At the same time health care delivery service was also evolving into new models that included many mergers. In 1995, Huntington Hospital, the single largest source of hospital referrals to Visiting Nurse Service, affiliated with the North Shore Health System, which had a Certified Home Health Agency of its own. In 1996, North Shore introduced representatives of their agency to provide home care services themselves to the patients treated in Huntington Hospital, presenting a competitive environment not previously familiar to the not for profit world.

At the same time Medicare sought to reign in mounting health care expenses, and in August of 1997, President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Act which changed the reimbursement method for Certified Home Health Agencies. Agencies such as Visiting Nurse Service, with growth in utilization and costs since the 1993 base year for new reimbursement calculations, experienced the greatest impact of reduced revenue per patient. In order to survive, VNS reduced the visits per patient and corresponding staffing costs. A grassroots letter writing campaign, and lobbying by the Visiting Nurse Associations of America and other membership organizations, ultimately resulted in legislative changes that specifically addressed the inequity of penalizing

cost efficient agencies such as VNS, and the agency not only survived, but became stronger at a time when agencies across the country were forced to close their doors.

Upon the installation of Jay Walsh as President of the Board of Trustees in 2001, he along with Hospice Medical Director Jerry Diener MD, and VNS staff, identified the need for a facility to provide the inpatient level of hospice care when needed. Until that time, hospital beds were utilized under contractual arrangement with Huntington and Mather Hospitals, however all were in agreement that the acute care environment of a hospital was not the homelike environment supportive of the hospice philosophy. Jay Walsh mobilized the Board and community to build the Hospice House, which ultimately opened its doors in November 2004 – the first free standing Hospice House of its kind in the state - at 101 Laurel Avenue in East Northport.

The current health care environment with continued emphasis on cost cutting and competition presents ongoing challenges for Visiting Nurse Service & Hospice of Suffolk and to similar community based agencies throughout the country. Improved technology provided increased statistical data that led Medicare to conclude the money they are spending is not paying for value as demonstrated by rehospitalizations and unsatisfactory disease management of our aging population. This has led to new initiatives for creative payment models that promote better patient outcomes in addition to saving money, and encourage coordination and cooperation among all health care providers instead of competition.

Visiting Nurse Service & Hospice of Suffolk has grown from its one nurse beginnings in 1952 to a staff of over 200 and over 100 volunteers. We have adapted to the ever changing health care environment with the flexibility to respond to changing health care needs of our community. Our commitment to the mission of Visiting Nurse Service has been steadfast since our early beginnings and given us focus through the challenges of change, and the one constant for which we are grateful on this 60th anniversary is the steadfast support of our boards, staff, volunteers, and the community we are here to serve.



Hospice House, which opened its doors in November 2004

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