

Elderly Camden Residents Receive Health Support through Home Visits from Rutgers–Camden Nursing Students



Nursing students Emily Kahn, Erin McGrier, Yaazmyn Rosa, Taylor Johnson, and Carmen Iossa with Northgate II resident Armado Picox

By Jeanne Leong

Yaazmyn Rosa’s weekly visit to Camden’s Northgate II affordable housing complex to help residents manage their healthcare needs is one of the most rewarding and inspiring experiences in her education at [Rutgers University–Camden](#).

Rosa and her classmates in the [accelerated bachelor of science in nursing program](#) are among a team of health care workers and social workers who provide in-home consultations to solve complex care issues for elderly residents.

“What you’re learning in class, you’re able to put it in practice,” says Rosa, of Moorestown, who is graduating in January 2020.

Working alongside Northgate II social workers, the Rutgers–Camden students conduct health assessments using the “Age-Friendly 4Ms Framework,” a national movement sponsored by the John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The framework evaluates what matters to the individual, any medications they are taking, mentation, and mobility. Students check for health issues common to elders, including depression, dementia, and risk for falls; review medications; and advise residents on health-related issues that are important to them.



Northgate II resident Joseph Rein with student Carmen Iossa

Some aspects of the assessment lend themselves more to the strengths of the social work staff, while some assessments require someone with a nursing background.

“I think a lot of these senior citizens don’t know where to start” when faced with many health and social problems. “I think having someone to talk to and go through the assessment process with them is important,” says nursing student Emily Kahn of Cherry Hill. “We ask them, are you able to do these things by yourself? Just because a person looks like they are able to take care of themselves, and bathe themselves, and clean their house, and get themselves dressed in the morning, doesn’t always mean they feel confident doing so.”

Since 2018, [Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden](#) students have had the opportunity to work with Northgate II residents through the [New Jersey Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program](#) (NJGWEP), led by the Rowan School of Osteopathic Medicine (SOM). It is a unique partnership between Rowan and the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden to provide interprofessional experiential learning to students in managing elderly residents’ complex care issues.

The experience at [Northgate II](#) is educational, rewarding, and helps to boost the students’ confidence in their nursing skills.

“All of us started there thinking, ‘we don’t know what we are doing,’” says Kahn. “It was nice to work together as a team, and say, ‘ok, I can explain this’ and ‘I can help them with these issues.’”

The NJGWEP, funded by a \$3.75 million grant to the Rowan SOM from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, supports grantees in developing a health care workforce that is prepared to integrate geriatric practice into primary care and promote best practices in caring for older individuals. The program provides a framework that allows residents and their families to participate in decision-making and is based on person-centered care.

Sometimes working with the residents requires simply providing some education or educational materials about how to handle a health issue, or ways to stay safe in their homes. In other instances, students may recommend that a resident have a follow-up visit with their primary care provider because they are having issues with memory, or having trouble walking, or could benefit from a medication review.

Rosa and her classmate Carmen Iossa successfully collaborated to help a patient who had numerous questions and concerns about his health issues.

“What I didn’t know, Carmen would provide the answer,” says Rosa. “When he didn’t know something, someone on the team would pick up on it, and by the end of the interview, the patient was happy. He got answers to all of the questions he had.”

“The program builds interprofessional collaboration into the experience,” says [Margaret Avallone](#), a clinical assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden and leader of the project for Rutgers–Camden’s involvement in the NJGWEP grant. “Learning to work in teams is so important because that is how they’re going to work after they graduate.”



Professor Margaret Avallone

Iossa says working with the Northgate II residents has given him new experiences that will be useful throughout his career. One of Iossa’s patients did not speak English. “It was a good experience for me, because a lot of times you’re not going to speak the same language as a patient,” says the Cherry Hill resident who will graduate in January. Iossa worked with a Spanish-speaking social worker who interpreted as they arranged a home health aide for a patient who had suffered two strokes and was no longer able to perform basic daily activities. Now, the home health aide comes to the man’s home five days a week, doing chores such as cleaning his apartment.

“That was an accomplishment,” says Iossa. “He had a lot of stuff in his apartment, and clutter in the corner, where there is a cord that he can pull to alert the building staff that he needs assistance. If he fell down, there’s no way he would have been able to get to it to call for help.”

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