

local resource profile

# Rehabilitation & Visiting Nurse Association

Home is where the health is

by nancy nichols

**H**ome healthcare is alive and well in Larimer County. Not only do a growing number of organizations make house calls, but one local agency has 30 years' experience doing nothing but house calls.

The Rehabilitation and Visiting Nurse Association (RVNA), a health agency with offices in Fort Collins and Greeley, has been providing skilled nursing and rehabilitation therapy to patients of all ages in their homes since 1979.

The agency has about 110 staff members, split equally between the two counties in which it operates, Larimer and Weld. The staff includes registered nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, home health aides and personal care providers.

Whether a patient needs ongoing care for a chronic condition such as cancer, diabetes or congestive heart failure, or simply needs short-term care to recover from an injury or operation, RVNA can help.

"We're the only community-based nonprofit (in the area) providing in-home care, and we take care of everybody," says Vicki Petts, an RVNA nurse who specializes in cardiac care.

RVNA receives donations and grant funding to help provide care to those with inadequate or no health insurance, serving as a safety net for people who can't afford private care. Funding comes from the Larimer County Office on Aging, Community Development Block Grant funds and private donations. When a new patient isn't able to pay, grant money can cover initial costs until the staff determines whether the patient qualifies for Medicaid or other assistance.

Typically a referral to RVNA comes from a local medical office, a hospital discharge planner or other community agencies. Within 24 hours of the referral, an RVNA nurse or other staff member, as appropriate, visits the patient at home to assess his or her needs.

"They're sending people home from the hospital so quickly nowadays, that we try to get to them within 24 hours of their returning home," Petts says. This prompt attention helps prevent complications such as wound infections after surgery. To further help with the patient's recovery, the medical staff teaches family members how to assist with care.

Petts, who typically sees about five to seven patients per day, says many patients simply need someone to help them take their pills properly. This is particularly true for people with developmental disabilities and some elderly.

"We work closely with agencies such as Foothills Gateway to help people with their medications," Petts says. RVNA uses equipment such as electronic medication boxes and personal emergency response systems.

Before joining RVNA, the seasoned cardiac nurse honed her skills in a major ICU in Chicago, in the ICU at McKee Medical Center in Loveland and as owner of a local foot-care company.

Now that she's with RVNA, she notes the difference between healthcare delivered at a medical facility and at a person's home.

"When you go into a house, you're a guest there," Petts says, making the relationship with patients in some ways more challenging — and also truly special. ✨

## HEALTH VISIT

Retired Kansas wheat farmer Eldon Treaster, now living in Fort Collins, gets his blood pressure checked by Vicki Petts, RVNA registered nurse.

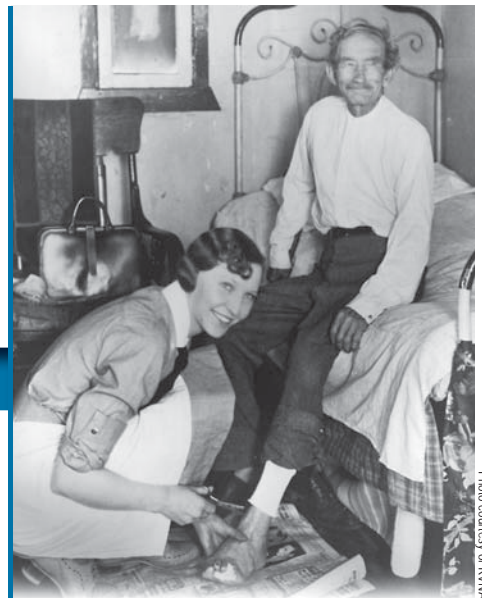


Photo courtesy of RVNA

## Origin of home nursing

The history of visiting nurse agencies dates back to the 1880s in New York, where free nursing care was provided to the sickest and poorest who otherwise would not have access to healthcare. The influx of immigrants to the Northeast spurred several visiting nurse associations to emerge to address the increased prevalence of illness and infectious diseases, such as polio and smallpox.

Lillian Wald, the pioneer of public health nursing, advanced the principle that, "Society benefits when healthcare is provided in the least costly and most comforting setting — most often the home."

Source: *Visiting Nurse Associations of America*, [www.vnaa.org](http://www.vnaa.org)

## Bringing healthcare home

Larimer County residents can contact the Fort Collins RVNA office for information and services.

107 Cameron Drive  
Fort Collins, CO 80525  
225-9399

[www.rvnahomecare.com](http://www.rvnahomecare.com)

*RVNA accepts Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance and private pay. Grant assistance is available for patients unable to pay. In addition to home healthcare, RVNA provides community health and wellness programs, including seasonal flu clinics.*