

John Tawiah on Patient Care in the Bronx

2 and half years ago, John Tawiah, Behavioral Health nurse had a unique job interview when he was applying for his current role in the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team. Instead of a typical office setting, John went out onto the field with the ACT team to aid someone who was experiencing a mental health crisis. "I had to decide then and there if I wanted to do this," he told the Bronx Times in an interview.

I think this is my calling

John Tawiah, RN, behavioral health

Since then, he has been working in the Bronx, visiting patients in their homes or on the streets – meeting vulnerable New Yorkers wherever they are – often in the middle of a mental health crisis usually tied to substance use disorders. John finds the work challenging, especially since many of his patients don't have insurance or haven't received help before. John often meets with the same patient multiple times to help them get the care they need. Even though the work is hard, he still feels the need to help his patients.

John's background helped him connect with his patients. He is a Bronx resident himself and emigrated from Ghana twenty years ago. Many of his patients in the Bronx community have something in common with him and he was able to gain their trust. "I think they are very, very comfortable with me," and

says that when approaching people and building relationships, “You have to be humble.” John feels helping others is the most rewarding part of his job. “It makes you feel like you’re making a change in their life.”

He shared a story of a young girl he helped overcome struggles with isolation, mental health conditions, and a poor relationship with her mother. After getting proper medications and support from team members, the young girl now has a better relationship with her mother and is starting to form bonds with others.

The work can be unpredictable, and although John acknowledges it isn’t for everyone, he says, “This is something I plan to do for a long time. Maybe until retirement.” He wanted to share one message to his fellow Bronxites, don’t give up on your family members or friends who need mental health care – even though they may be difficult to deal with. He hopes others in the community work together to stop stigmatizing mental health conditions and give support to those who need it.

“We need your help.”

VNS Health has several behavioral health programs, including crisis intervention, and substance use treatment, that support people of all ages. Learn more about our Behavioral Health programs.

Behavioral Health Services

