

EDHeroes

PROFILES



Everyday EDHero

Noel Santos

ED STAFF NURSE

OVERLOOK MEDICAL CENTER

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– Sharon Kelly,
Manager Emergency Services



EDHeroes Profile: Noel Santos

As chief traffic conductor, Santos relies on smart teamwork and cutting-edge technology to keep cases moving through the unit.

More than a century ago, a 26-year-old physician named William Henry Lawrence founded a hospital on the highest point in Summit, N.J. — a 42-bed facility committed to care for “all proper and deserving cases whether able to pay or not, and to take emergency cases at all times.”

Though much has changed at Overlook Medical Center in the years since — its view of Manhattan is more dazzling and its bed count has topped 500 — the institution remains as dedicated as ever to excellent emergency care.

For proof, step inside Overlook’s state-of-the-art Emergency Department and meet ED Staff Nurse Noel Santos. Though it may not be evident from his easy smile and relaxed demeanor, his round-the-clock preoccupation is ensuring that the ED delivers top-notch care to every patient who crosses its threshold.

These days, that’s no easy task. Like Overlook’s sister medical centers in New Jersey’s acclaimed Atlantic Health System, it now regards the emergency unit as the “front door” of the hospital — the portal through which most patients enter. Last year Overlook’s ED welcomed close to 100,000 visitors — an impressive share of the five hospital network’s 2013 total of nearly 315,000 emergency visits.

When a staff member comes to him with a problem, Santos says, “I try to solve it right then and there. If I see a problem and there’s a solution for it, I act on it right away.”

Problem solving and quick action are key

"Noel always goes above and beyond to support the staff," says Sharon Kelly, Overlook's Manager Emergency Services. "He knows that everyday grind can bring all of us down — so he makes a point of lifting us back up. No matter how busy a day becomes, Noel is there to step in when staff members need an extra pair of hands to care for a critical patient."

Santos sees "stepping in" as an ordinary part of his job: "Working in the ED is hard enough as it is," he says. "I just try to make life easier for everybody." Thus when a staff member comes to him with a problem, Santos says, "I try to solve

it right then and there. If I see a problem and there's a solution for it, I act on it right away."

Problem-solving appears to come naturally to Santos. Recently, he found a way to simplify the emergency response to accidental needle sticks suffered by hospital employees. At the time, an inadvertent needle stick typically was followed by hours in the ED as unit caregivers steered exposed employees through the federally mandated process for filing injury reports, requesting blood screenings from source patients and determining the proper course for post-exposure treatment.

"All this paperwork was very confusing and cumbersome for employees," recalls ED Staff Nurse Andrea Samms. "It added lots of time and stress to an already troubling situation."



Overlook Hospital was founded in 1906 by Dr. William Henry Lawrence, Jr., who at the age of 26 bought the Faitoute property on the highest point in Summit overlooking the Baltusrol Valley.



Santos curbed both stress and time waste by creating a step-by-step needle stick procedure guide for each floor of the hospital. Now whenever a needle stick incident occurs, Samms explains, "you can just grab the binder and everything is done correctly the first time."



Streamline the process, look at the big picture

Just by assembling the guide, Samms says, "Noel streamlined the entire process. Everyone in the hospital has benefited. Federal safety regulations are being more closely followed. Our employees are being served more swiftly. The ED has freed up precious time. And charge nurses from all the units are really grateful for this change, because they no longer have to hunt down a pile of paperwork every time a needle stick occurs. They already have it right at hand."

Having reliable information within reach makes every hospital task easier, which explains why emergency nurses are so fond of ED PulseCheck, the best-of-breed ED EMR introduced across the AHS network in 2005. "ED PulseCheck gives all of us an instant bird's-eye view of what's happening in the ED," says Kelly. "It helps monitor every ED performance metric so that we can work as a team to manage traffic in the moment."



Meeting community needs as the patient population increases

Santos has used ED PulseCheck to drive all sorts of improvements within his unit — from boosting patient throughput and speeding up admissions originating in the ED to creating accurate weekly snapshots of ED performance. The snapshots often reveal new opportunities to improve ED workflow, freeing caregivers to focus on caring for patients.

One thing that clearly matters to Santos is helping Overlook — and the entire Atlantic Health System — navigate through the whirl of change it now faces. “We’re a teaching hospital,” explains Kelly, “and we serve a wide variety of patients. As smaller hospitals close and our volume continues to increase, we’ve launched new outreach efforts so we can better meet community needs. Noel is involved in that work every step of the way.”

Yet when it comes to connecting with the community, Santos starts his work right in his own emergency unit. “Noel brings humor to everything he does,” says Lou Faraone, Coordinator Emergency Services. “He’s always smiling, always helping. He’s always looking for the good in everyone — and for ways to celebrate his coworkers. He’s our cruise director.”

There’s no better time to see Santos in full cruise director action than during the run-up to National Nurses Week in May. That’s when you’re likely to catch him with a camcorder in hand, capturing the

daily drama of life in the emergency unit. “It’s a video profile of the nurses,” Santos explains, “and includes interviews of the managers. It’s just a way to give thanks to all the nurses throughout the hospital, to recognize their hard work.”

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For Santos, whipping up a quick video is just another way to keep spirits high in his hospital’s busiest department. After all, as Santos sees it, Overlook’s emergency unit doesn’t have one ED hero, but dozens. “All the nurses in the ER are working hard,” he says. “We all work together.”



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