

Tremblay takes charge of Visiting Nurses

By JENNIFER L. KRONHOLM

SALISBURY — There's a new hand at the helm of the Salisbury Visiting Nurse Association (SVNA). Patricia Tremblay, R.N., M.S., replaced Marilyn Joseph as executive director on Jan. 1.

"Marilyn was the real heart of this organization for 31 years and is in a well-deserved retirement," Tremblay said.

Tremblay, 52, comes to SVNA from Simone Consultants, LLC, of Westborough, Mass., where she had worked as a senior manager and consultant since 2005.

"A lot of my work was in interim management — stepping in as president or CEO," she said. She said she helped organizations with staff education, organizational development and starting home health and hospice programs.

Prior to her consulting work, she was president of Visiting Nurse Association & Hospice of Northern Berkshire, Inc., in North Adams, Mass.

She said her work in the health-care field has taught her that she enjoys — and is good at — the operations part of the business.

"Consulting is good," she said. "It gave me a lot of the solid experience I was looking for. But travel is tough when you have a husband and family."

Tremblay lives in Lanesborough, Mass., just north of Pittsfield, with her husband and four teenage daughters. "And I was looking to get back in the field. I have been very interested in getting back to a community-based home health and hospice organization."

SVNA looked like a "perfect opportunity" to her.

In addition to home health-care, which includes occupational therapy, speech therapy, physical therapy and social work services, SVNA provides hospice care and support to area child-care centers, supplies nurses to the elementary school and offers free, public wellness clinics.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER L. KRONHOLM

Jeannine Remmey, R.N., a case manager at Salisbury Visiting Nurses Association, and Patricia Tremblay, the new executive director, demonstrate some of the technology they use to care for their patients.

"I'm glad to be able to focus on the needs of a community rather than a system-driven entity where providing care is second to ensuring the survival of the organization. SVNA has a true commitment to the community and the community is committed to it." Tremblay pointed to the all-volunteer board and the volunteer hospice program.

SVNA is a nonprofit organization, but it is not exempt from the troubles of the health-care industry. Medicare reimbursements continue to shrink and SVNA is committed to providing care to residents of Salisbury and surrounding towns regardless of their ability to pay.

"We're trying to look at how we can continue to provide top-notch, quality services and stay financially viable," Tremblay said. In addition to reimbursements from Medicare and other insurers, SVNA relies on grants from the town and private donations.

One of the ways Tremblay hopes to cut costs is by expanding the use of telehealth units, small computers that can monitor patients in their homes.

"We're focusing on patients with diagnoses that result in increased emergency room visits or hospital admissions," she said. The top three diagnoses are congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and diabetes. "By using these

units and standardizing care, we're hoping to reduce the use of emergency care."

The telehealth units are able to monitor vital signs such as weight, blood pressure, blood oxygen level and temperature. They also ask patients questions about how they've been feeling and their recent activities. The patient's answer prompts a response from the machine that offers education or a suggestion for how to relieve certain symptoms.

"For example, if the machine records a 1.5-pound weight gain in 24 hours, it will prompt the patient to limit salt intake," Tremblay said.

Other ways Tremblay tries to monitor the agency's costs are by encouraging her nurses to schedule their home visits in a loop, so they don't waste gas or time, and by equipping each nurse with a laptop to record patient documentation. They also employ products that speed the healing of wounds, decreasing the number of dressing changes and home visits required to care for the wound.

"We're always looking for ways to be efficient as well as effective," she said.

Tremblay said she is optimistic about the future of SVNA and excited to be working with "a very talented staff."

"I'm looking forward to a long tenure," she said. "I'm proud to say I work with a strong, great staff and a phenomenal board."