

House Calls, An Old Practice Proving That It Works Today

By Melissa Weidman

Healthcare is a constantly evolving field, with new care delivery options emerging to meet the wide range of medical, geographic and lifestyle needs of patients and families. One of these relatively newer models is physician house calls, a new take from an old practice many years ago when primary care doctors often delivered care in patients' homes.

Currently, 10 percent of patients account for 65 percent of the dollars that Medicare and other insurers spend every year. These patients have been diagnosed with serious illness, are often older and frailer, and because of their medical condition, have difficulty getting out to any kind of medical office. Especially here on Cape Cod, going anywhere beyond one's own immediate neighborhood usually requires a car and ability to drive. Public transportation is limited and can be untenable for anyone who is homebound, or home-limited, with physical or cognitive issues.

For this population, the most effective way to deliver healthcare is at home. That's why HopeHealth, a not for profit healthcare organization providing medical care, care management and support services to people experiencing serious illness or loss throughout eastern Massachusetts, founded Hope HouseCalls, a primary-care-at-home service, and a pioneering house calls practice in the region.

HopeHealth CEO and President David Rehm says, "Patients who have a taxing effort to get to their doctor's office can be seen in their homes. Research demonstrates this type of practice can improve quality of life and patient satisfaction, while reducing unnecessary hospitalizations, readmissions and emergency room visits. For these compromised patients, the Hope HouseCalls physicians typically become the patient's primary care provider, coordinating all medical care including arranging for lab tests, medical equipment, medical supplies and prescriptions."

The house call model has been shown to reduce hospitalizations. In randomized trials, there was a 65 percent reduction in hospital days with a 50 percent cost savings and a 50 percent reduction in hospitalizations. The Mt. Sinai Visiting Doctors Program found that house calls resulted in an 82 percent reduction in



hospital admissions.

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