



Quality Healthcare — Close to Home

With increasing numbers of senior citizens living at home, innovations in home health care delivery are a necessity. Local hospitals can be crowded in the winter with a high cost for emergency care. The purpose of this article is to discuss a proven concept of rendering healthcare in the home setting for most stable patients.

In the 20th year of my private practice experience, I find that many new developments in home health services are available, but are seldom made known to patients. Many oral antibiotics have proven efficacy with treating pneumonia and other infections, without having to resort to intravenous dosing. If needed, injections may be given in the medical office on a daily basis, with monitoring by a home health nurse. As long as the patient is able to perform minimal activities of daily living, home health care is not only a more comfortable, but also a more cost effective alternative. Supervision by a case manager, in partnership with families, becomes a team approach, with the physician acting as the leader. Case managers coordinate home health aides, visiting nurse services, medication delivery and compliance but also act as the eyes and ears for the physician leader. These professionals – which include nurses, physical therapists and social workers - are typically clinically trained in a specific area of medical expertise.

There is a plethora of home equipment that could be ordered by the physician to bring health care to the home setting. Oxygen, respiratory nebulizers, walkers, shower chairs, CPAP equipment for treatment of sleep apnea, to name a few, are available from local medical equipment vendors. In some cases, x-rays may be obtained by mobile services arriving at your doorstep. Blood work and medication delivery services are also available. Physician home visits can also be arranged by appointment for the homebound. All this can be arranged if the patient is medically stable. The patient does not need to be acutely ill for such care. A twice-yearly physical exam and review of medications, with blood work and appropriate x-rays would first establish the doctor-patient relationship. Preventative health care should be initiated with each wellness visit to decrease the risks for acute infections and unexpected illnesses.

Did you know that most illnesses may not present with obvious symptoms? Many malignancies, anemia, sleep disorders, including diabetes mellitus, can predispose one to more devastating illnesses.

Common situations requiring the Home Health Team approach are those in which patients have difficulties obtaining transportation to the doctor's office, or for those senior citizens living alone. More commonly, the homebound may have busy family members who have to work or live a long distance away. Stable illnesses - ranging from dementia, Parkinson's disease, bronchitis,



heart failure, wound infections, recent strokes, or even hypertension and mild diabetes - can best be monitored in the home setting. A visual inspection of the domicile setting may provide clues on patient safety. A review of medication inventory and proper usage would take place. Nutritional support services may be provided, especially, for those who have difficulty in obtaining daily meals. A safe home rehabilitation program can be formulated to keep patients ambulatory. **HB**

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