

Spring 2020

The Patient's Advocate

An update from a national leader in home-based medicine



**Housecall
Providers**

Part of the CareOregon Family

**Improving lives
by bringing
health care home**



After years of selfless dedication, Nanci and Paul made their love “official” with a spiritual wedding encouraged by their Housecall Providers social worker.

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housecallproviders.org

Love (and teamwork) conquers all

History is full of stories of love that's been forged through adversity. Following in the tradition of couples who have overcome great odds to be together, we have Nanci and Paul: lifelong Oregonians, stalwart survivors of chronic illnesses and now, husband and wife.

On Valentine's Day, 2020, and twelve years after they first met in the hospital during one of the hardest parts of their lives, Nanci and Paul stood together under the eaves of a 19th century pioneer church, alongside their spiritual advisor and Housecall Providers' chaplain, Dean Yamamoto, to celebrate their love and commitment in front of their families, friends and God.

This moment almost never happened for many reasons. Over the course of their relationship, Nanci and Paul

have faced obstacles that would have destroyed a lesser love. Nanci has long struggled with serious health problems that have limited her ability to work and travel outside the home. Over time, Paul found himself taking on the role of full-time caregiver, a situation that has worked well for their household.

“We just do better when we're together,” Paul says, while relaxing in an oversized recliner in their tidy and comfortable living room, petting one of the couple's two beloved cats.

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Rebecca Ramsay

PROTECTING YOURSELF, YOUR FAMILY AND YOUR COMMUNITY

Please continue to follow Governor Kate Brown's stay-at-home order and CDC guidelines. You can also reach out by phone or computer to 211, a free, confidential referral and information helpline and website that connects people to the essential health and human services they need. 211 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

CEO REPORT

Dear patients, caregivers, family members and community supporters,

The last month has been unprecedented, to say the least. As COVID-19 extended its reach, CareOregon and Housecall Providers started preparing for what we knew was coming to the Northwest.

Our preparations have focused on how to care for our patients — the most vulnerable targets of the virus — while doing everything in our power to protect both them and staff members who would be going into their homes. At the same time, we heard from our state leaders about the need for social distancing and limits to visitors in facilities. Our biggest concern echoed that of health care communities across the U.S.: lack of available personal protective equipment (PPE) — including masks, gowns, gloves and goggles and/or face shields — which is essential to protect our patients and staff and prevent the spread of COVID-19. We quickly realized that our limited supply required that we temporarily suspend or significantly limit in-person visits across all our programs until we received the amount of PPE necessary to protect our patients, caregivers and staff. Currently, we are still waiting for additional supplies, but they are anticipated shortly.

We are rapidly implementing alternative care options for our patients. We have instituted telephone visits and will soon launch telehealth video visits using a platform called doxy.me. Administrative and/or clinical staff will be working with patients and caregivers to schedule a visit that suits the situation.

The decision to suspend house calls was not easily made and it is being reevaluated daily. As this situation unfolds, we are continually exploring avenues to obtain PPE. Staff, eager to pitch in and help with the shortages, started resourcing materials to make face shields for their colleagues. We are engaging with local companies to ensure we have reliable channels if our emergency supplies dwindle. I have been so inspired by our staff, partners and local businesses whose tireless dedication and commitment helps us get through this crisis.

We are committed to resuming house calls at a more typical pace, but not at the expense of the health of our patients, caregivers or staff. We are closely following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Oregon Health Authority (OHA) guidelines and will update our policies as new guidelines unfold.

Please stay safe and take care of yourselves during this challenging time.

Rebecca Ramsay
Rebecca Ramsay, MPH



Nurse Practitioner Barb Sutton finds inspiration in the generous spirit of the communities she helps in Jamaica.

Far from home, our providers bring health and hope to those who need it most

For many of our primary care providers, offering home-based medical care is a calling to help our most vulnerable community members experience the best health possible. It would appear for two of our providers, the word “community” extends far beyond the boundaries of the Portland metro area.

Over the last few years, Housecall Providers Physician Assistant Ivan Wang and Nurse Practitioner Barb Sutton have traveled to Haiti and Jamaica, respectively, to provide medical care to citizens of two of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Ivan traveled in the fall of 2018 with the Vancouver, WA group Haiti Foundation for Hope, spending eight days in rural northern Haiti. They were there

to support a clinic – that the foundation had helped to create – expand its reach with a medical campaign. Joining him was a pediatrician, an OB-GYN, nurses, paramedics and a pharmacist. The team provided care to over 700 patients in just five days. Ivan alone treated nearly 100 patients – mainly those with GI issues, a result of infected water.

It was his hope to return last fall, but the country has been on lock down amid violent protest.

According to the World Bank, more than half of the population of Haiti lives below the poverty line, surviving on less than 2.4 U.S. dollars a day.

“The health disparities and the hardships that Haitians go through are immense,” says Ivan. “The people who are pretty low income here in the U.S. have so much more than their counterparts in Haiti.” Even with a high poverty rate, Ivan says that things don’t cost that much less than in the U.S.

Alarmingly, only four percent of Haitians live past the age of 65, which is not surprising considering the extreme poverty and the high unemployment rate (some estimates as high as 70 percent) that exist in the country.

“So many couldn’t afford lab tests, so we made presumptive clinical diagnoses with empiric treatment plans because of a lack of resources,” says Ivan. “Even though they cost very little by our standards, \$1 to \$5 dollars.”

Like Ivan, Barb also saw extreme poverty and lack of health care resources when she volunteered to go to Negril, Jamaica with a clinical team run by her friend, Nurse Practitioner Susan Bartsch of The Joshua Mission. She recently returned from her third trip in three years last February.

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On the side of angels

“I believe that without the tender loving care of Housecall Providers Hospice, my father would have died a long time ago” Radha Kumar tells me, as we sit in her family’s cozy Beaverton apartment. In the next room, her father, Narasimh Botta – aka “the Doctor” – dozes peacefully surrounded by awards, diplomas and pictures of his loved ones.

This room is nearly 8,000 miles from the Doctor’s hometown of Vizag, India, where he had a prestigious career as a medical professor. He taught well into his 70s, long after his only daughter, Radha, married American Sanjay Kumar, and immigrated to the U.S.

About 14 years ago, the Doctor started to become agitated and anxious. Soon after, his memory began to falter, and he was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease. Radha’s mother took care of him as his symptoms became more extreme.

One night in 2013 Radha received a phone call that her beloved mother had been hospitalized with a brain aneurysm, leaving her father wandering through their neighborhood confused and alone. After a grueling 27-hour



Radha Kumar and her family count on Housecall Providers for help with the dementia care and support her father needs.

flight back to India, Radha made the decision to remove her mother from life support. She was now the sole caregiver for her father and would remain in India for five months, separated from her husband and young son, to plan for his future. “It was so sudden. I had no one to help me. I had no time to grieve,” says Radha.

As an only child, Radha didn’t have much family support, and it proved impossible to find caregivers who could handle the Doctor’s difficult behaviors. With all other options exhausted, Radha decided to bring her father to the U.S. and care for him herself. “My parents were very good to me and I couldn’t just abandon him,” she explains.

After much effort and expense, the Doctor received a green

card in 2016, allowing him to stay in the U.S. Despite his lawful status, the Doctor cannot qualify for Medicaid, Medicare or any form of subsidized health care program for five years after his arrival, leaving the Kumar family in a difficult position.

When the Doctor suddenly stopped eating in November 2018, Radha and Sanjay reached out to Housecall Providers. As a nonprofit hospice dedicated to those in need, our team helped get the Doctor a hospital bed and provided his family with essential caregiving visits, supplies and education.

“We were doing our best, but the team has empowered us to care for him in a better way,” Sanjay says. “The quality and

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Love (and teamwork)

(From page 1)

The idea for a spiritual wedding was raised by Housecall Providers social worker, Sarah Jo Tomlin. “I could see how much she and Paul cared for each other,” Sarah says. “It made sense that they would want to formalize the love they’ve shared for so many years.”

Christmas of 2018 was particularly difficult for Nanci and her family, culminating in a severe exacerbation of her chronic illness that landed her back in the hospital. “I realized that God kept me alive for a reason, and I decided I need to change things,” Nanci recounts.

Since then, with the help of her Housecall Providers team, Nanci has made great strides. She has lost over 165 pounds and convinced Paul to join her in kicking their smoking habit for good. “It hasn’t been

easy,” Paul reports, “but Nanci helps keep me on track.”

Nanci credits Housecall Providers with supporting her changed lifestyle. “Other systems in the past had this ‘one size fits all’ attitude, they wouldn’t personalize things. Housecall Providers helps us get whatever we need, they’re always one phone call away, and they really care about the whole person.” Paul notes, “They work as a team – and that is really exceptional.”

After vowing to love each other forever and put each other above all else, Nanci and Paul walked down the aisle as husband and wife to the song, “Bless the Broken Road” by Rascal Flatts, whose lyrics are particularly poignant considering the obstacles this family has had to overcome.

**“This much I know, it’s true
That God blessed the broken road
That led me straight to you.” ■**

On the side of angels

(From page 4)

professionalism of the care we’ve received has been so consistent and they’ve been so dedicated and courteous.”

“I think you are all angels – actual angels on earth right now,” says Radha, tearfully.

Beyond help for an immediate need, the support Housecall Providers offers has given the couple a renewed appreciation for the goodness inside all of us. As Sanjay puts it, “My entire outlook on people has changed because of Housecall Providers Hospice. We want to thank the people who have made this possible. It means so much to us. We’ve realized that people you barely know might be the ones who help you most in life, and we promise we will pay it forward.” ■

Advanced Illness Care program gains national attention



Brenda Hartman, RN, not only visits Advanced Illness Care patient Sandra Capello but also her two pups when she makes a house call.

The Housecall Providers Advanced Illness Care program was featured in the Sunday, March 1 print edition of The New York Times. The story, “Who Will Care For Society’s Forgotten?” can be accessed through the paper’s digital archive or a link at housecallproviders.org.

A special thank you to our patients who shared their most intimate selves with writer Theresa Brown and

photographer Leah Nash. The two combined to articulate in the most beautiful way the reasons why we are so committed to our work.

To watch a video where our Advanced Illness Care patients reflect on how community-based palliative care has helped them cope with the complications of living with serious illness, please visit the Housecall Providers YouTube channel. ■

Far from home

(From page 3)

The team was offered a church to use as a makeshift clinic and provided examinations from 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. to anyone who came through the door that week. The majority of what they treated was hypertension, diabetes and high cholesterol.

The clinical team included four nurse practitioners, two nurses and two EMTs, and a few people from the Rotary Club who helped with administrative duties and patient intake. While they only saw 300 patients this year compared to the 500 they treated last year, plans are in place to remedy

that decline and increase foot traffic in the years to come.

Having the medical team there not only helps those who have acute problems that can be treated at the visit, it removes the costly first step of having to be seen at a standard clinic when more lab work or testing, 2.5 hours away at the hospital in Montego Bay, is necessary. The team worked with a local doctor who wrote orders and referrals for those who need further treatment.

“It costs about \$30.00 up front for someone to walk into a health clinic to get the care they need, but \$30.00 is an enormous amount of money in

Jamaica,” Barb explains. “If the doctor says that they need tests or medication then they have to pay for that too, so it’s easy to see why so few people are accessing basic health care.”

Barb was struck once again this year by the generous spirit of the Negril community, and how they gave even when they had so little to offer.

“The church that housed our clinic last year took up a collection and gave us \$200 to support our efforts in whatever way was needed,” Barb remembers. “It was overwhelming to see that kind of generosity on full display.” ■