

Fall 2021

# 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**



Owen Miller and his family maintain their connection via a safe, outdoor visit in the Africa Savanna habitat at the Oregon Zoo.

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[housecallproviders.org](https://housecallproviders.org)

## Connection makes your health grow stronger

**COVID-19 has not only fiercely attacked the at-risk elders in our community physically — eight out of 10 COVID-19 deaths reported in the U.S. have been adults 65 years or older — but also takes a toll on their emotional and psychological bodies as well.**

Many Housecall Providers patients in adult care homes and assisted living facilities remained quarantined for the majority of 2020, separated not only from their families and friends but from people living down the hall, too. Experts say that, within this segment of the population, that type of prolonged isolation can lead to depression, anxiety, increased dementia and weight loss.

Families needed to get creative in response to the loneliness and boredom facing their loved ones, and they did. We all heard stories and saw videos of people playing music and singing through bedroom windows or donning full personal protective equipment to wheel their mom or dad to the nearby park for a change in scenery and some needed time together. Some elders even entered the social networking world (a few reluctantly) to hear (See “Connection makes your health grow stronger” page 5)



## FROM OUR CEO

**Rebecca Ramsay, MPH**

When you read the stories in this issue, a definite theme emerges: connection. If there is anything positive to take away from the last 20 months, it's that we understand now more than ever how essential it is to be with each other. That engagement can give us a sense of belonging, make us feel that we are needed and connected, strengthen our community and help ward off the poor health outcomes that isolation can create.

In our cover story, we have another glimpse into the toll that the COVID-19 stay-at-home order had on our elders, especially those living in facilities. Families got creative to keep the connection alive as best they could over those months of uncertainty.

Perhaps no other program at Housecall Providers was impacted more by COVID-19 than our volunteer program. When the pandemic hit Oregon, we had to suspend volunteer house call visits due to safety concerns and PPE shortages. While a core group of volunteers continued to assist with administrative work at home, most of our volunteers waited patiently for the opportunity to resume direct services to our patients. Thankfully, that time is right around the corner, as we plan to resume home-based volunteer visits in early 2022.

In our final story, "No more trips to the hospital," we see the benefit of our continuum of care and how our patients can easily flow from one program to another as their care needs change. As the title explains, once Jeff Olson came under our care, his trips to the emergency department ceased because he was getting the care he needed at home. I see this as one of the greatest gifts we offer the community – being able to stay with our patients throughout the course of their lives.

All of us at Housecall Providers wish you and yours a safe and wonderful holiday season.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca Ramsay". The script is fluid and cursive.



Housecall Providers volunteers look forward to spending time with our patients again beginning in early 2022.

## Volunteers will resume home visits in early 2022

(by Todd Lawrence, Volunteer Coordinator)

**There is no vaccine for loneliness. No prescription for isolation. These are the symptoms of the COVID-19 virus that science and technology cannot hope to cure. Simply said, people need other people. It's a matter of medical significance.**

For more than 10 years, our patient care volunteers have dedicated themselves to showing up for our patients. So, it has been painful to shut down. Every one of our volunteers thinks about our patients. They know that they are there, and they know that this time has been especially hard for them.

Resuming volunteer visits while the COVID-19 pandemic is still raging is, ultimately, an act of courage. I have been struck,



**Volunteers help patients and offer much-needed personal connection.**

as I approached volunteers about a return to activity, by the enthusiasm and determination that always colors their responses. They know they are needed, and it appears they are ready to get back to service.

The process of “getting back” isn’t an easy one. It requires an organizational commitment. Many of our senior clinical staff have dedicated their time to developing an enhanced volunteer training program that ensures the safety of volunteers and patients alike. Our human resources department is gathering new documentation, and we’ll need to figure out how to do new tasks like making personal protective equipment available to volunteers all over the Portland metro area. Finally, dozens of volunteers will have to work with us to attend online trainings, meet new documentation requirements and integrate new safety practices into their previous routine.

That said, I am very happy to announce our intention to bring Housecall Providers volunteers back to the lives of our patients early in 2022. If you would like to be a part of our amazing team, please reach out to me at 971-202-5515 or [volunteers@housecallproviders.org](mailto:volunteers@housecallproviders.org). We would love to hear from you! ■

# No more trips to the hospital

Jeff Olson has endured quite a lot in his 66 years. After spending his childhood in and around Astoria and graduating from Rex Putnam High School in Milwaukie, at 17 he enlisted in the Army, where he spent nine years as a mechanic. “They promised me I would be a driver when I signed up, but my test scores prevented that from happening,” he says.

After his military service, he returned to the Astoria area where he spent a few years working on fishing boats and at the docks before becoming a truck driver. Nearly a decade later, a traffic violation ended his driving career and his life started to unravel. He worked odd jobs for a while, never quite keeping his head above water. Eventually, he lost his housing.

Jeff spent several years living on the streets, and his health started to deteriorate. His back and neck began to hurt constantly, an affliction he’s still managing today. His breathing became labored, and he developed COPD along with emphysema. With a mounting list of challenges and a meager disability income, Jeff moved into an apartment in east Portland where break-ins and trouble were a constant



**Social worker Sarah Jo Tomlin works with Jeff Olson to make sure his health issues are stable and he continues to do well.**

backdrop. He finally found an apartment in Tigard, where he was able to spend several years in relative peace.

At this point, though, Jeff’s failing health and upstairs apartment led to a new problem: falling down. He estimates that he called 911 around 20 times during his final year in Tigard, most of which led to trips to the emergency department. He recalls the Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue (TVFR) emergency responders with some fondness despite always encountering them under difficult circumstances. He recalls the time they brought his cat to a shelter to be cared for while he was hospitalized and sent a team to clean his apartment while he was away. When Jeff was referred to Housecall Providers’ Advanced Illness Care (AIC) program, the team

met with TVFR and learned that Jeff was on their frequent caller list for months and they knew him on a first-name basis!

Once Jeff was in our care, the AIC team started the process of helping him find an assisted living facility. When he transitioned to primary care, the move-in was completed. Social worker Sarah Jo Tomlin was with him the day he moved into his new apartment. The team worked to stabilize his health issues and got him an electric scooter/wheelchair to help him get around. On a recent visit, she remarked on how well he was doing. “I cannot tell you how relieved and happy I am to see Jeff in a setting where he can get around easily and where there are staff to assist him with his needs,” says Sarah Jo. “I am really glad this move happened before he had a major fall.”

[\(See “No more trips” page 6\)](#)

## Connection makes your health grow stronger

(From page 1)

the latest family news, meet a new grandchild or family pet, or just to see a familiar face looking



### Owen relaxes in his favorite chair.

back. While the last 20 months have been bleak — especially before the COVID vaccine was available —these types of interventions have truly kept the home fires burning and shined a light on the importance of staying engaged and connected with each other during the toughest of times.

While living alone in a fifth-floor apartment of his retirement community suits him, Housecall Providers patient

Owen Miller has had a strong family connection during the pandemic. His daughter Kate Miller phoned him daily and, when the weather was good, met him outside in the courtyard for some face-to-face time. His grandchildren, son and daughter-in-law visit, too, and took him out once it was safe to do so.

Three months before the lockdown, his granddaughter purchased an Amazon Echo Show, a video chat system that is summoned when the magic word is spoken. Through that device, he gets to have video visits with her and his two great grandchildren.

When it comes to entertainment, nothing tops the list like YouTube. “When I introduced dad to YouTube ten years ago, he absolutely loved it, and has been an avid watcher ever since,” says Kate. He enjoys videos on forestry, mining and nature, but especially videos about how things work, which keep his mind active and alert.

Owen has tried to socialize with other residents at the dining hall but, with COVID-19 and scheduling rules, those opportunities are few and far between. With the news of his 104th birthday making the rounds, he is pleased that he has become something of a celebrity. “People know my name now, but the problem is, I don’t know theirs,” he says, laughing. Still, the reality of isolation within his community due to mobility issues and restrictions was apparent in his joke.

Owen has been a patient for five years under the care of Nurse Practitioner Cathie Gurgle and, according to Kate, has enjoyed their relationship. “Dad always feels better after a visit from Cathie because she listens and addresses his worries or concerns right there in the comfort of his favorite red chair,” she says. “It has taken a lot of pressure off me knowing that Housecall Providers will be there for Dad the rest of his life.” ■



### Want to pay your bill online?

Check out your next statement for Primary Care services. You’ll notice a new easy-to-read format and a new option to pay your bill online. The statement will show the web address [PayMyDoctor.com](https://www.paymydoctor.com). This is a new, free, secure and easy way to pay your bill.

## No more trips to the hospital

(From page 4)

Since becoming a patient at Housecall Providers, Jeff has not been to the hospital a single time! His health situation has stabilized, and his living situation no longer poses a threat to his safety. He still suffers from neck and back pain, but his emphysema and COPD are being managed by his in-home medical team. He says he would like to take a trip out to Fort Stevens to see the old property where he used to live. He's looking forward in his life, which has been difficult in the past. ■

## Mobile devices becoming a central part of everyday life

At Housecall Providers, we are updating our technology to make it easier to communicate with our patients by text or email. If you or a family member are one of our primary care patients, please share your preferred cell phone number or email address with us next time you speak with one of our schedulers or care coordinators so the information can be saved in your chart.

