

Spring 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**



Primary care social worker Kirk Porter checking in with a family member.

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A year in review: The impact of COVID-19

Like all health care practices across the U.S., the leadership of Housecall Providers prepared last spring as best they could for the time when the pandemic would overtake our city.

At the first sign that COVID-19 had landed in Oregon, the team assembled a task force to create and prioritize their multi-layered response. Foremost on their minds was how to protect staff, caregivers and family members so we could continue to deliver in-home medical care.

While there is never a good time for something of this magnitude to strike a community, it arrived during a period when Housecall Providers was hitting its stride. The primary care and hospice censuses were both at or just

below record highs, and the Advanced Illness Care program (community-based palliative care) was holding steady at its projected monthly numbers.

“As a hospice, we were very excited with what 2020 was going to hold,” says Hospice Manager Richard Holman. “We had hit our highest census in years and had growth indicators that suggested we were going to be able to serve even more people – then came the lockdown.”

(See “A year of COVID-19” page 5)



Patricia and Dede Montgomery sharing a bit of fresh air together at the park near the adult care home where her mother lived before moving in with her.

Daughter brings mom home for final months of life

The early months of the COVID-19 pandemic were especially hard for Dede Montgomery. Her mother, Patricia, was living in an adult care home where understandable restrictions to keep residents and staff safe were also preventing families from visiting loved ones.

Dede and her family had to settle for window visits. But because her mother had age-related macular degeneration coupled with dementia, these types of interactions were difficult. After three months when the weather warmed up, they were allowed to visit outdoors while wearing masks.

“It was one of the most difficult things I have gone through, especially knowing that her well-being and health were deteriorating,” says Dede.

Prior to the virus landing in Oregon, Dede’s mother had daily visits and outings with family and friends. Now, sometimes she wouldn’t have the energy to get out of bed, which meant that they couldn’t see her. On good days, though, her family would wheel her to a nearby park to sit in the sunshine, listen to music, talk and read.

“Our mom stopped walking during this period – I believe because she wasn’t going on outings with family,” says Dede.

Although they were fortunate with warm weather, Dede worried with the approach of fall that visits with her mother would diminish due to inside restrictions not being lifted.

“Our inability to visit outdoors during the week of the wildfires was awful,” says Dede “This was around the time when I made the decision to prepare to move her into our home. It was fortunate I was mandated to work from home, so mom was able to move in with us the morning of Halloween,” says Dede.

The move allowed the family to be with Patricia during her wakeful times, which in the past were difficult to predict because she was in the care home. Though she slept a lot, since her bedroom was the former dining room or “Grand Center,” as Dede puts it, she got to see a lot of family members through the day.

“We would listen to music together much of the time, read a lot, visit or sit quietly with her as she was dozing,” says Dede.

Dede requested a hospice consultation a few months after her mother – a Housecall Providers primary care patient since October of 2019 – moved in because she remembered friends telling her that they had wished they had called earlier when the time came for end-of-life care.

(See “Daughter Brings” page 6)

FollowMyHealth, the Housecall Providers patient portal

During the last year, more and more people have been asking how they can access their or a loved one's medical records through a patient portal. Housecall Providers' patient portal is called FollowMyHealth. Below are answers to some of our most asked questions about this platform.

What is the FollowMyHealth patient portal?

The FollowMyHealth patient portal is a totally free, secure and HIPAA-compliant way to review medications, communicate with your primary care provider, or track progress through a treatment. To sign up for the portal, call our offices at 971-202-5500 and request an account.

What can I do with my patient portal account?

The patient portal lets you keep up to date with changes to your medical record, including after-visit summaries, medication lists and lab results. You can also send a secure message to the Housecall Providers medical team.

Who can access the FollowMyHealth patient portal?

All patients may receive a FollowMyHealth patient portal or may designate a person to access the portal for them.



Interested in setting up a patient portal account for yourself or a loved one? Please contact your care team to start the process.

Guardians and powers of attorney of patients can also register for access.

Why can't I just e-mail my provider directly?

Regular email is NOT secure. Please do NOT send any health information or identifying information, including names and dates of birth, through regular email or on the Contact Us page of our website.

I am a proxy for a patient, but when I log into FollowMyHealth, there is no information – I see my own name but everything else is blank. What should I do?

The FollowMyHealth account belongs to you and may include your personal health information if this is the system your doctor

uses too, otherwise it will look blank. **If you have proxy access to someone else's account, you need to access this through the menu on the top right of the banner.**

"I encourage all of my patients to enroll in the patient portal themselves or give access to someone they trust. I love being able to send a quick, secure message to answer a patient's question or communicate a plan. The portal makes it easier to stay connected to patients and families, and for them to really know what's going on with their care."

**- JC Provost, APRN, DNP, FNP
Primary Care Associate
Medical Director**



A very happy customer! Caregiver Bob Ferguson and Clackamas County Public Health Nurse Jolynn Miller after Bob received his COVID-19 vaccination.

Partner Spotlight: Clackamas County Public Health Agency

It's a bit unusual for us to select such a large public health agency as our spotlight. But considering the service that Clackamas County Public Health performed in helping to vaccinate our homebound patients in their area against COVID-19, it seems only fitting.

Housecall Providers and Clackamas County joined forces after discussing the limited options homebound community members had to get vaccinated. Using Maptive, the geo-mapping software that assists in scheduling in-home medical appointments, Housecall Providers grouped the patients so that drive time between stops would be minimal, thus making the vaccination process as efficient as possible for County Nurse Jolynn Miller.

"Housecall Providers cut down my prep and drive time considerably with Maptive," says Miller. "So much so that I recommended it to my boss, who saw its worth immediately and now we have a similar mapping software for our team."

Miller, who visits homes regularly through working with two of the county's programs – Cocoon and Babies First! – said she was happy to take on this roll and learn about the services Housecall Providers offers. After

entering the homes, it became immediately evident there was just no way that these people would be able to navigate any of the current vaccination options, not even a pharmacy.

"Everyone I saw was so grateful I was able to visit their home," says Miller. "I think the most popular comment I heard was how much people are looking forward to just being with their families again."

Miller started the first round of vaccinations in mid-February and finished the second-round shots in late March. All in all, she vaccinated approximately 125 homebound people.

"I love that I have the freedom to use my judgement inside the home and spend extra time if I need to, and that I'm not just another medical person rushing them through," says Miller. "I think this is the best part about partnering with Housecall Providers because they take the same approach to care." ■

Have questions about hospice care?

Reach out to our office at **971-202-5501** to discuss any questions or get more information.

A year of COVID-19

(From page 1)

While we waited for the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) to arrive, both primary care and hospice quickly implemented a telehealth option so that we could continue to serve our patients. Hospice was the first of those two programs to visit patients safely in home once the right amount of PPE was secured to resume house calls. Advanced Illness Care relied on telephone check-ins with patients and outside visits, too, when weather permitted.

“Pausing our new patient intake and house calls for the first six weeks of the pandemic definitely took its toll. It was heartbreaking to not be able to admit new patients to our primary care service temporarily, and this also impacted our bottom line,” says CEO Rebecca Ramsay, “but our focus had to be on our hospice patients who were at the end of life.”

That meant that during those weeks, roughly 80-90 patients did not come on service as quickly as we would have hoped. And due to the lockdowns imposed by care facilities across the metro area to keep their residents and staff safe, patients were not enrolling at the pace they normally would.

Now, with many of those assisted living residents and

staff being vaccinated in the initial wave, face-to-face visits have been more frequent across all the programs. And an uptick in new patients coming on service has been noticed too.

“More and more patients living in all different types of environments are becoming comfortable with in-home medical visits because they are aware that most of our staff has been vaccinated, that they are tested regularly and are always wearing proper PPE,” says AIC Manager Kelly Ambrose.

Still, there are those homebound patients in private homes and adult care homes (ACH) that have not yet been vaccinated.

At this point, Housecall Providers has not been provided with vaccine by the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) and therefore not able to offer this service to our patients. However, we have been very proactive in advocating for our patients to be prioritized for the vaccinations.

“Currently, we are partnering with OHA to identify ACHs

that fell outside the initial long-term care strategy for patient vaccination, and we are highlighting the importance of including those homes in their planning,” says Ramsay. “We are also partnering with the public health agency in each of the three Portland metro counties (see Partner Spotlight) to implement a strategy to vaccinate all our patients that are homebound and living in private home settings.”

Housecall Providers has been offering scheduling and outreach support to these public health agencies to help expedite the vaccination process of this select group.

“This pandemic has required our staff to make rapid and significant changes to their daily work – adding to their already overflowing plates,” says Ramsay. “They have met the challenges presented this last year with grace, resilience, humor and passion for our patients, and we have become a stronger and more flexible organization as a result.” ■

Been considering home-based primary care for you or a loved one?

Our low waitlist makes this a perfect time to call our intake team at **971-202-5500** for more information.



Daughter brings mom home for final months of life

(From page 2)

"I half expected her not to meet the hospice criteria because other than dementia, her health was good," says Dede. "Our family was incredibly relieved when she was accepted, and I was impressed with the seamless transition between primary care and hospice. It made it all so easy to handle and I felt so supported."

Dede says that the hospice team helped them be better informed, so they in turn could make better decisions. An example of this is

when they advised her not to get her mother up from her hospital bed into a wheelchair since she would only sleep in the chair and it was exhausting her further. Additionally, the advice on feeding and when to no longer offer food was perhaps the single most powerful information that the family received.

"The 24-hour advice nurse phone line was perhaps, for me, the most important service," says Dede. "I'm not sure how many times I called, usually for simple things, but I never felt like I was asking a silly question and the clinician was always kind, understanding and compassionate."

Her mother passed about four months after she moved in with the family, spending nearly five weeks on hospice. Dede has written about her experience caring for her mother at the end of life on her blog (dedemontgomery.com) in the article 127 nights to treasure forever.

"Being with my mom through the dying process in our home and without a health care provider in the room was one of the most beautiful, difficult and important things I have done in my life," says Dede.

"I am eternally grateful I made the decision to bring her home." ■