

Visiting doctor service delivers peace of mind for caregivers

Caring for an aging or seriously ill loved one while juggling family and work responsibilities can be an overwhelming and daunting task. Yet imagine that instead of coaxing a sick loved one into a car or medical transport, you can simply put some tea on and wait for a knock on the door. And imagine on the other side of the door is a doctor toting a black bag, a scene reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell painting. This image may seem like an old-fashioned one, yet house calls are alive and well today thanks to VNA Health Group's Visiting Physician Services team.

"A lot of the patients that we see remember when they were a child and the doctor came to the house, so there's a familiarity there and a sense of comfort," said Dr. Sara Leonard, medical director for Visiting Physician Services (VPS).

For many geriatric patients who increasingly struggle with trips to the doctor's office or clinic because they have mobility issues, chronic illnesses or simply are unable to leave the home, a visiting doctor is a lifeline, enabling them to receive comprehensive care without leaving the comfort and safety of their home. These home visits can also provide a major relief for caregivers, whose burden is lessened when they no longer need to arrange transportation for routine checkups and tests, or worry about how they are going to get mom or dad out of the house safely. And in light of the past couple of years with the COVID-19 pandemic, safety has become the No. 1 priority in health care, especially among this most vulnerable population.



VNA Health Group, which offers home-based primary care through its Visiting Physician Services division, offers peace of mind and support for caregivers.

Heartfelt Thanks from Families

The caliber of care provided by VNA Health Group's Visiting Physician Services has been well-received by patients and their families as demonstrated by the many letters of thanks expressing their gratitude for home visits:

- One long distance caregiver whose mother lives in Manchester, N.J., recently wrote to commend the care her mother was receiving: "Kristen, the nurse practitioner, has a way about her which helps my Mom feel relaxed, comfortable, trusting and cared for. Above and beyond that, Kristen, through her diligence and compassion has eased my mind whilst I live far away. She has taken her time by telephone to respond to my calls and patiently address my questions and concerns."

- Another family member writing to thank VPS for the longtime care provided to her husband shared, "We have been most impressed and pleased with all the personnel and services my



Visiting Physician Services makes house calls to homebound older adults in eight New Jersey counties.

husband has encountered at Visiting Physicians, but the nurse practitioner, Nancy, stands out. She amazes us with the breadth of her knowledge and the acuity of her diagnostic skills as well as the empathic emotional support she provides. She is one of the most caring people we have ever known."

- One daughter wrote to express her thanks to Dr. Bessen, "I wanted to thank you for the wonderful care you gave to my mom in her last years. I appreciated your patience and willingness to answer our questions and the guidance and support you provided."

Comprehensive and Compassionate Care

Visiting Physicians' mission for over 28 years has focused on providing accessible medical care to frail, elderly patients who can no longer regularly get out to see their doctors. In addition to physical exams, in-home diagnostic tests such as EKGs, X-rays and bloodwork can all be done in the home. Visiting Physician also provides Telehealth, wound care, medication management and diabetic, cardiac and respiratory assessments. Other in-home services also can be arranged, including dental, podiatry, physical therapy, optometry and more. A social worker also is on staff who assists with assessments, links patients to community resources and helps patients safely transition from the hospital or rehab to home.

All in all, it's a comprehensive array of health care services. But it's more than just care: They form bonds with patients and those who watch over them at home. "As I visit with my patients, I listen to stories about their grandchildren or life experiences," Leonard said. "We are often seen as extended family."

The same goes for the relationship built with the person providing care, whether it's a spouse or adult child or even an aide. "With a home visit, I can see what level of health the caregiver also has," Leonard said. "At a lot of times, the communication is with the caregiver." House calls can help ease the stress on caregivers and greatly improve the quality of life for everyone.

Visiting Physician Services is part of the Parker Advanced Care Institute at VNA Health Group and accepts Medicare, Horizon, Amerigroup and Aetna. For information, call 732-571-1000, email info@visiting-physician.com or please visit vnahg.org/vps.

— By Visiting Nurse Association Health Group