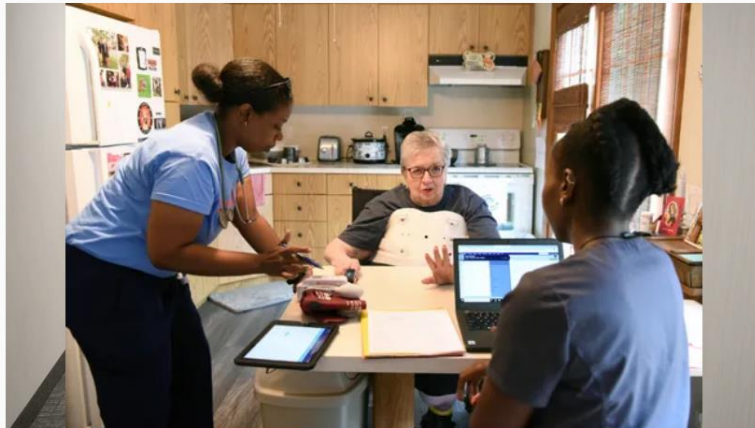


Once a thing of the past, Valley Hospital is bringing back house calls

Stephanie Noda, North Jersey Record Published 5:30 a.m. ET Aug. 2, 2019



Wheelchair bound patient Patricia Booth receives a house call from DispatchHealth on July 31, 2019.
Amy Newman, NorthJersey

Need stitches, but in too much pain to leave the house? Sick at home, but without a way to get to the doctor?

DispatchHealth, a Denver, Colorado-based company that brings in-home, on-demand health care service, and Valley Hospital have teamed up to bring back the house call to New Jersey.

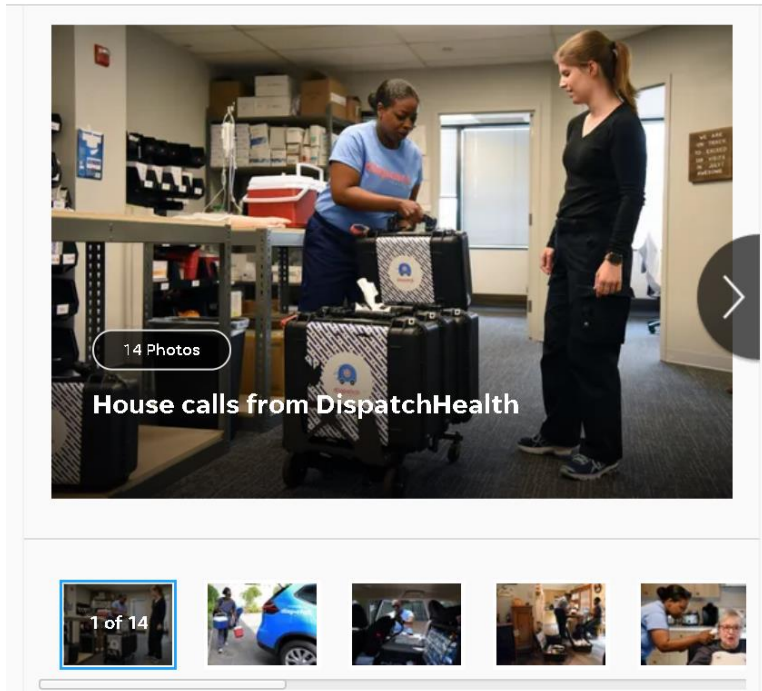
The partnership between the two agencies began in June, and around 200 patients throughout Bergen and Passaic counties have been visited, said Daniel Medina, market director for DispatchHealth.

"There's something comfortable about being in your own element and having a sense of privacy," Medina said.

Although the heyday of the house call ended decades ago, there are still some medical practices in the area that offer the services. These, however, are often intended mainly for elderly or housebound patients.

DispatchHealth will treat a variety of ailments, like strep throat, flu, digestive problems and sinus infections. The staff can also perform IVs, put in stitches, attach splints, do blood tests, drain boils, insert urinary catheters and test for infectious diseases.

How it works



When someone calls the DispatchHealth phone line, which operates all year from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., an operator will ask questions to determine if the patient needs to go to an emergency room or if he or she can use the house call service, said Mark Vogel, an emergency room physician at Valley Hospital and co-medical director for the DispatchHealth service.

From there, the patient can either request same-day care or for another day of the week. A two-person team (a nurse practitioner or physician assistant with a emergency medical technician) will drive to the patient's home from the company's Woodcliff Lake location, typically spending about an hour with each patient.

Data gathered during the visits will be sent to the patient's primary care doctor.

"We are not trying to work independent of a health system, but work with it for care," Vogel said.

The service operates in around 40 communities, primarily in Bergen and Passaic counties. For a complete list, see below.

The service takes most insurance, Medina says. It bills the insurance directly, with a co-pay that can range around \$0 to \$50. For those who are uninsured, there is a flat fee of \$275.

One of DispatchHealth's patients is Patricia Booth of Franklin Lakes, who had an accident in 2017 that changed her life. While she was entering an elevator in New York City, the

doors began to close on her, causing her to fall backward onto the ground. She wound up breaking her back.

Booth, who has a rod implanted in her spine for scoliosis, would go through two surgeries to stabilize her back, and now uses a wheelchair. She has difficulty traveling to a doctor for appointments.

During a Wednesday morning visit to Booth's Franklin Lakes home, Danielle Turner and Joviane Azlin, the two-person DispatchHealth team, checked a sore on Booth's back, detailed how she'd been responding to her medication, took her blood pressure and checked other vitals. The two listened to Booth's concerns and recording the findings.

"I get better care from them than when I go to the emergency room," said Booth, a former nurse herself.

When Turner and Azlin helped Booth into a bed to examine the wound, the three of them had an easy rapport.

"You have such tiny feet!" exclaimed Booth about Azlin as the two helped her get settled.

"Not according to my mom," Azlin responded with a laugh.

Busy families



DispatchHealth offers mobile on-demand, urgent care to patients in the comfort of their homes. Physician Assistant Joviane Azlin, on right, asks questions of patient Patricia Booth during a follow-up visit on a wound check and bandage change, while medical technician Danielle Turner takes Booth's vitals on July 31, 2019. (Photo: Amy Newman/NorthJersey.com)

Medina, a father of two children, said parents often find it difficult to bring one child to a doctor when their other child is healthy.

He described house calls as "a convenient model that you can use rather than putting them both in the minivan and bringing them to the urgent care or the ER."

Turner recalled one call where an entire family returned from vacation sick. Instead of having to visit different doctors and pediatricians while feeling unwell, all the family members were treated at the same time, said Turner.

Those who have anxiety about visiting a hospital or urgent care center may also feel more comfortable with seeing a health care professional in their own home, Turner said.

"It really means everything to them," said Turner. "Since they didn't have to leave, they might not feel like they are going to die, since they are at their home."

Right now, DispatchHealth has one van that responds to about seven to eight calls a week. The group is looking into getting a second vehicle and expanding their service area, said Medina.

One tip Turner can give patients about visits? Dress comfortably.

"The funny thing I find is that if they came to my house, I would definitely be in my pajamas," said Turner. "But a lot of times, people want to dress up since 'we have company over' and wear their Sunday best. Just be comfortable."

DispatchHealth services the following towns:

- Allendale
- Elmwood Park
- Franklin Lakes
- Ho-Ho-Kus
- Midland Park
- Oakland
- Ramsey
- Glen Rock
- Fair Lawn
- Mahwah 07430
- Ridgewood
- Saddle River
- Upper Saddle River
- Waldwick
- Wyckoff
- Maywood
- Cresskill
- Dumont
- Paramus
- Montvale
- Park Ridge
- Washington Twp.
- Woodcliff Lake
- Emerson
- Hillsdale
- Oradell
- River Vale

- Westwood
- Old Tappan
- River Edge
- Bloomingdale
- Ringwood
- Riverdale
- Hawthorne
- Haledon