



Meeting the Growing Demand for Homecare

By Sumir Sahgal, MD, MS, FACP

Established in 2005, EssenMED House Calls serves as New York State's largest medical house calls provider, caring for nearly 4,000 home-bound, elderly, and disabled patients throughout the five boroughs of New York City and Westchester county. Equipped with the latest state-of-the-art mobile technology, EssenMED House Calls providers travel to patient homes in order to deliver high-quality, compassionate health care that ensures patient safety and comfort.

EssenMED House Calls was created by parent practice Essen Medical Associates, P.C., in response to a number of beloved and severely ill patients failing to attend life-sustaining check-ups. After much exploration, the problem presented itself in full color: many elderly and disabled patients were stranded in their homes, unable to leave for the care they desperately needed. These home bound patients, like many across the country, are often plagued by multiple chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These illnesses are made worse by the difficulties homebound patients have accessing primary and specialty care.

Without consistent medical attention, many homebound patients are forced to cope with a poor standard of health and as a result often cycle between their home, the emergency room, and the hospital. The mission of EssenMED House Calls is not only to ensure that patients are provided accessible and affordable home care, but also to alleviate costly hospital readmissions and frequent emergency room visits.

For example, Floris Davis is a 98 year old patient of the EssenMED House Calls program. In addition to multiple chronic illnesses, Ms. Davis suffers from a debilitating foot infection that has kept her homebound and invisible to a majority of the world around her. House calls, however, offers Ms. Davis medical management and coordination of care in the comfort of her home. Her daughter and loyal caregiver Sharon can call up EssenMED House Calls to arrange for a provider at home equipped with the necessary electronic records and medical tools to give Floris the care she needs. If she is in pain, a podiatrist is there to diagnose the issue; if she is low on medication, a provider can coordinate with her local pharmacy to home deliver the necessary drugs; if she is in need of medical equipment such as a hospital bed or glucostrips, staff will coordinate the delivery of these resources. The main priority is keeping Ms. Davis in the best possible health, allowing her family to take care of her and preventing hospitalization or nursing home admission.

Ms. Davis's story is not an unfamiliar one, and it resonates throughout the elderly community. With the aging baby boomer population growing, many will require in-home care. In fact, the elderly population is expected to double between 2000 and 2030. House call services become more crucial as the elderly, disabled, and chronically-ill homebound community grows. The cost-efficiency for both patients as well as insurance providers is clear. Among the findings of an empirical data review, EssenMED House Calls significantly reduced hospitalization rates, thereby saving Medicare millions of dollars. These results, based on a sample of 800 HMSNY patients who had enrolled into a Medicare/Medicaid HMO, show the intervention of EssenMED House Calls to be a key reason why the hospitalization rate for these patients decreased by nearly 37% over the course of one year.

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Figure 1. EssenMED Pilot Project - Comparison of Hospital Admissions Rates

| Patient Group | Numbers | Base Admission Rates per 100 of HMO | Base Admission Rates per 100 of EssenMED | % Change |
|------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|--|----------|
| Patients before Pilot* | 800 | 77 | 63 | |
| Intervention | 800 | -- | 40 | -36.51% |

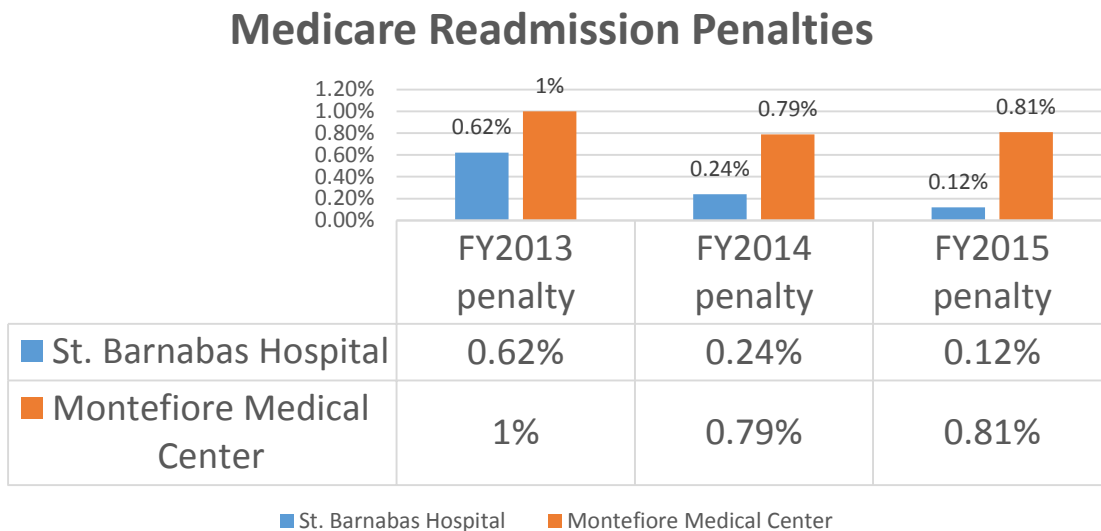
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*Comparison group was not part of the pilot program that intervened and engaged with the patients.

Over years of providing house calls, EssenMED House Calls has implemented a number of integral services that seek to expand in-home care and give patients and their caregivers/family the comfort of knowing that medical attention is readily available. The Transition of Care Program is a prime example of such a comprehensive patient-centered, caregiver-friendly tool. Transition of Care Program (TOCP) is a post-discharge management program designed to help patients transition back into the community following hospitalization or nursing home admission. Patients are followed -- starting from the date of discharge -- during the critical time period when they are most likely to develop complications that lead to avoidable re-admissions. During the interim period, patients receive vital medical care through in-home provider visits and regular telephone follow-ups. TOC also coordinates a variety of services necessary to ensure that patients recover quickly and remain safely in their homes.

Just recently, EssenMED House Calls and St. Barnabas Hospital were recognized for significant reduction in hospital readmission rates, a direct result of the TOCP in coordination with quality hospital care. Since partnering in 2013, EssenMed House Calls' TOC providers cared for over 2,400 of St. Barnabas Hospital's chronically-ill patients. Now, at a time when almost all urban hospitals face increasing penalties for readmission by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), St. Barnabas is the rare exception, having the lowest penalties among those hospitals this year.

Figure 2. St. Barnabas Readmission Penalties Compared to Montefiore



In short, EssenMED House Calls is dedicated to the underserved, the underrepresented, and the underprivileged, embracing the re-emerging popularity of house calls. Home care is a patient-centric team effort involving the family, caregivers, and medical team. By bringing the care to the patients in the comfort of their homes and ensuring coordination of care, EssenMed House Calls works tirelessly to bring the house call to as many people as possible. *Dr. Sumir Sahgal is Chief Medical Officer of EssenMED House Calls and Essen Medical Associates, PC, based in New York City. He may be reached at ssahgal@essenmd.com.*