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# NO PLACE LIKE HOME

**WHEN PEOPLE ARE OLDER, INFIRM OR JUST CAN'T GET TO THE DOCTOR, NORTHWELL'S HOUSE CALLS PROGRAM BRINGS CARE TO THEM — DEEP POCKETS NOT REQUIRED**

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Written by **BARBARA BRODY**

**M**artha Moschetti is 96 years old and has her share of health problems — she suffers debilitating arthritis and has been through several major surgeries. “She has good days and bad days,” says her husband, Paul Moschetti, 93, who serves as her primary caregiver in the couple’s Manhattan apartment. A while ago, Paul started having trouble getting her to medical appointments. It was tough to arrange for a car with a wheelchair ramp, and difficult to get Martha in and out. “She’s not big, but someone who can’t stand at all is always going to be hard to lift,” says Paul, who gave up driving a few years ago.

Often, someone like Martha ends up in a nursing home; many in her position simply stop getting regular medical care. But that’s not what happened. Thanks to Northwell’s House Calls program, Martha gets all her health needs attended to from the comfort of her home.

A doctor who makes house calls might seem like an anachronism, but Christopher Paredes, MD, a family and geriatric medicine specialist, doesn’t travel by horse and buggy or carry a

vintage apothecary bag. The director of Lenox Hill Hospital’s House Calls program, Dr. Paredes brings modern medicine into the homes of a wide swath of medically fragile New Yorkers. The service isn’t limited to Park Avenue millionaires. Dr. Paredes goes where he’s needed, whether that takes him to a penthouse or public housing. He brings his laptop, a backpack stuffed with medical supplies and a deep sense of gratitude.

“You develop really meaningful relationships because you’re there for these people during the most vulnerable time in their lives,” he says. “These are people who would otherwise be forgotten.”

## **A home-safety assessment**

A typical home visit lasts about an hour, though Dr. Paredes often spends up to two hours when meeting a new patient for the first time. “I have the privilege of entering someone’s home, which affords the opportunity to look around and make suggestions,” he says. He’ll spend time checking for trip hazards, like loose rugs











Dr. Paredes and other House Calls physicians go where they're needed throughout Northwell's extensive catchment area.

When House Calls patients contact the program, they're able to avoid hospitalization

**82%**  
of the time

While at-home care might sound expensive, when done properly it actually saves money for society, says Dr. Paredes, in large part by helping patients avoid unnecessary hospitalizations. In fact, of all the home-based primary care programs in the country, House Calls is number one in Medicare savings. "We're part of the Independence at Home demonstration project from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), where we have demonstrated that the program delivers quality and savings," says Dr. Deligiannidis. "We've saved the government over \$27 million over the course of the last seven years."

Affordability makes it possible to deliver the kind of care people prefer, says Zenobia Brown, MD, senior vice president and Northwell's associate chief medical officer. Dr. Brown is executive director of Health Solutions, Northwell's care management organization.

"Home is where most older patients want to be," says Dr. Brown. "The success of House Calls shows that it's possible to allow people to age in place safely, gracefully and with dignity. We can provide individualized, patient-centered care at home, and we can do it sustainably."

## A medical team on call

While primary care providers such as Dr. Paredes provide the bulk of patient care, they are part of a larger care team, which includes nursing, care coordinators who arrange transportation and medical equipment, and social workers. Program

and wires, and discussing a patient's diet; he'll also review his patients' medications and supplements to check for interactions and unnecessary duplication. He comes equipped with all the tools he needs for a thorough examination, and, when necessary, enlists the help of colleagues who also make house calls to deliver more specialized care.

But the best part is the intimate connection he forges with patients when he literally meets them where they are.

"It's a great program," says Paul. "I do not feel Martha would have any better treatment if we actually went to his office."

## Better care, lower cost

For more than a decade, Northwell's House Calls program has been providing quality in-home care for frail, chronically

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ill and other homebound patients. It serves all of Northwell's communities, with patients in Manhattan, Northern Westchester, Staten Island, Queens and the entirety of Long Island; it will be expanding into Brooklyn and the Bronx soon, says Konstantinos Deligiannidis, MD, medical director of Northwell House Calls.

More than 1,800 people currently receive care through House Calls, many of them living with conditions such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes, pulmonary disease and Alzheimer's. Patients are typically over 65, have two or more chronic conditions and need help with two or more "activities of daily living" — such as getting themselves dressed, fed and bathed. Most patients enter the program when they're about to be discharged from a hospital or rehabilitation facility.



It's hard for Martha Moschetti, here with her husband, Paul, to get to the doctor — so House Calls brings the doctor to her.



members also have 24/7 access to registered nurses, other physicians and Northwell's emergency medical services team, who can address urgent questions, and, if necessary, provide same-day visits.

A clinical call center is staffed by triage nurses with emergency department or ICU experience. When the program's paramedics are dispatched to a patient's home, they conduct a thorough assessment as well as a video call with a House Calls physician before deciding whether a trip to the hospital is necessary. If needed, the physician can order additional at-home tests, such as X-rays and ultrasounds.

"That kind of specialized expertise makes a big difference," Dr. Paredes explains. "When an elderly person calls 911, they're taken to the emergency room 90% of the time. When a patient in House Calls contacts our number, we are able to avoid hospitalization 82% of the time."

Over the past few years, Martha Moschetti has gotten a wide range of services from the House Calls program without going past her front door. "She got Covid shots at home, had X-rays and had blood tests done by a traveling phlebotomist," says Paul. "Dr. Paredes even told us about a dentist who makes house calls."

## A "silver tsunami"

Dr. Paredes's journey to home-based care started long ago. He remembers being inspired as a child by seeing how his mother, an internist, treated her patients. Then,

when Dr. Paredes was still in college, his mother became a patient herself — she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer.

"Initially, her prognosis was grim," he recalls. When she ultimately improved, "I felt like God had given me back my mom. To give back, I decided to follow in her footsteps and serve the underserved. That's why I got into medicine."

He finds geriatrics extremely rewarding. "You truly see the difference that you make," he says. "Sometimes, you have the honor of seeing someone take their last breath, and you're able to assure the family that their loved one wasn't in pain."

Health care experts say there's a pressing need for doctors like Dr. Paredes, and for innovative ways of addressing the needs of the elderly. The number of older adults is rapidly rising: By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be of retirement age, and by 2034, the number of adults 65 and up will exceed the number of children under age 18, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Millions of these people will eventually be homebound — and based on the current availability of care programs, many of them might not be able to receive any medical care at all, says Dr. Paredes. He hopes that in the future, programs like House Calls will become so widespread that no one who has trouble leaving their home will be left out.

"I believe House Calls should be open to all geriatric patients who have difficulty getting care — period," he says. "Most people don't want to be in a nursing home. When I get older, I want this kind of care for myself."

## 5 tips for healthy aging

Christopher Paredes, MD, has some easy advice for staying fit and independent:

### 1 USE IT OR LOSE IT

Move as much as possible to increase the odds of staying mobile as you age.

### 2 SIP OFTEN

Lack of water can contribute to constipation, dizziness and lack of energy. "A lot of adults have a million-dollar workup because they don't feel quite right, only to find out that they're mildly dehydrated," he says.

### 3 STAY SOCIAL

Many older adults become lonely and isolated, which takes a toll on their physical and mental health. Schedule calls with friends and family. If you're able to, get out into the community and volunteer or take up a new hobby.

### 4 FIND A DOCTOR YOU TRUST

An honest, collaborative relationship with your primary provider becomes even more important as you age.

### 5 DISCUSS ADVANCE CARE PLANS WITH LOVED ONES

Think ahead and share your wishes, so loved ones are well-informed in case you're one day unable to advocate for yourself.