

# Doctors do residential work

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While the days of doctors arriving at patients' houses on horseback seem distant, they're just beginning again in the Triangle area.

Upgrade the horse to a car, add an extra big black bag and meet Doctors Making Housecalls.

Beginning practice in September 2002, Doctors Making Housecalls was founded by Chapel Hill residents Dr. Shohreh Taavoni and her husband, Dr. Alan Kronhaus.

"It was my wife's idea," Kronhaus says. "We were just driving down the road one day and pretty much out of the blue, she said, 'Hey, what do you think of the idea of starting a practice dedicated to house calls?'"

From there Taavoni talked Kronhaus into implementing the idea and working as the practice's manager. Today the practice employs six physicians, and Kronhaus estimates that they make 6,000 visits per year.

"There was a tremendous need for this kind of good care among people who had difficulty getting to the doctor because of physical limitations, or mental problems, or just



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Dr. Shohreh Taavoni, a physician in Doctors Making Housecalls, leaves her Chapel Hill home on Thursday morning to care for patients in their homes.

logistical issues," he explains.

The doctors offer their services to patients aged five to 105, but the older demographic tends to seek their services more often.

Some patients can't find a ride to the doctor's office or have physical difficulty in getting there. Others want to avoid the waiting room, choosing instead to see the doctor in the

comfort of their own home. Doctors Making Housecalls even visits places of business when people can't take time off work but need assistance.

The practice also provides care to upscale hotels in the area, such as the Carolina Inn, a fact that amuses Kronhaus.

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## HOUSE CALLS

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"Here it is, the Carolina Inn, which sits in the shadow of one of the world's biggest medical centers, and when their guests get sick, they call us," he chuckles.

But Kronhaus adds that it is understandable.

"Who wants to go sit for eight hours in the emergency room? If you have a true medical emergency and the ambulance needs to rush you somewhere, you go to the ER."

Not only is Doctors Making Housecalls convenient, it also helps foster a good relationship between the patient and the doctor.

"The doctors that are attracted to our practice are doctors who ... are really interested in people, interested in establishing an ongoing relationship and in really getting to know their patients," Kronhaus says.

Sunrise Senior Living at North Hills in Raleigh is one assisted-living community that Doctors Making Housecalls visits weekly.

"There's a lot of consistency, which is really important for the elderly," says Morgan Zarvis, director of community relations.

"They need something every week, things change, and they always have

questions for the doctors. It's a doctor that will actually sit down and talk to them for 20 to 30 minutes as opposed to run in for 10 minutes and run out in 10 minutes."

Joan Jacoby, a radiation and oncology nurse at Cancer Centers of North Carolina, used to take time away from work to bring her mother, who lives at Sunrise, to the doctor. Now her mother is treated by Doctors Making Housecalls.

"I don't miss twice as much time from work. She's comfortable in her own environment, much more so than in a doctor's office."

And the doctors making the calls say they are not limited by the fact that they do not work out of an office.

"We can do a tremendous amount on site in the way of tests and procedures," Kronhaus says.

"We bring other people in to, say, draw blood and transport the specimen to the lab, where we can run whatever tests we want. We can do X-rays, echocardiograms and so forth."

Another benefit of house calls is a lesser risk of medical liability, which is one reason Taavoni left Raleigh's Capital Family Medicine to start Doctors Making Housecalls.

"A lot of the underlying problem with medical malpractice stems from the fact that patients become unhappy for whatever reason with their physicians," Kronhaus says.

"Our patients tend to form good relationships with their physicians."

Most private practices contract with insurance companies to attract customers, but because Doctors Making Housecalls does not, they had to advertise a great deal to start the practice.

The only company the group contracts with is Medicare, which is one reason the group tends to serve an older demographic.

Kronhaus says the only disadvantage to his practice is the fact that it is more expensive because of the travel charge and amount of time spent with the patient.

He adds that the practice could be the start of something very big.

"I think we're just scratching the surface in the applications of the service and the profession as well as the public truly understanding how valuable this service can be, not only in terms of improving the quality of care, but dramatically reducing the cost of care."

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