

UW Health: Future of public health - home-based care

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MADISON, Wis. – Last year, as hospitals were inundated by COVID-19 patients and clinics needed to limit appointments for infection control, homebound patients were left particularly vulnerable to a lack of routine medical care.

These patients, often elderly, were not able to come to outpatient clinics for their care due to the COVID-19 pandemic; care that is critical for someone who may have a complex medical history or is in poor health.

UW Health decided to increase its efforts to reach these patients during the pandemic through its home-care partner Care Direct and a new home-based primary care service that gives homebound patients access to the same level of care they would have in a clinic setting, according to Dr. Melissa Dattalo, medical director, home-centered care, in the Office of Population Health at UW Health, and assistant professor of medicine at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

A team comprised of a doctor, nurse practitioner, nurse, social worker and other personnel make home-based and telehealth visits to patients and conduct the same tests, exams and treatments as they would in a clinic setting.

“An important reality that was magnified during the pandemic is that we can’t let our most vulnerable patients suffer because they cannot come to the clinic,” Dattalo said.

Home-based care will be a key part of keeping people out of the hospital in the future – an important component of population health – as well as keeping some of the most vulnerable patients healthy during the next pandemic, she said.

“UW Health has been helping to lead a transformation that is happening around the

country; implementing home-based primary care and other innovative home-based services, in an effort to keep people healthy and out of the hospital,” Dattalo said. “The importance of this was magnified during the pandemic when our hospitals needed capacity for COVID-19 patients.”

Apart from crisis situations, most people who are eligible for this care – homebound or nursing-home eligible – would rather be cared for at home than in a hospital, she said.

“We find patients prefer these settings, but we also find that their outcomes and satisfaction are better when they can be cared for at home,” Dattalo said. “It is a win-win for both the patients who enjoy the high quality of care provided, and for the health system to have lower costs.”