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VEPACHEDU EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

The Telangana Science Journal

Health and Nutrition

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Chief Editor: Dr. Sreenivasarao Vepachedu¹

Issue 221

CONCIERGE MEDICINE

INTRODUCTION

[The TV show Royal Pains](#)^(a) features young and handsome concierge doctor [Hank Lawson \(Mark Feuerstein\)](#)^(b), who hops from mansion to mansion in the tony Hamptons section of Long Island, taking care of every ache, pain and exotic ailment of his rich and famous patients in their own homes. In the US, house calls used to make up 40 percent of doctors' visits in the 1940s, before going into decline in the 1960s reaching about 1% these days. As patients' lost control of payment, they lost the ability to signal how much they valued their time, and house calls declined. House calls have been labeled a vanishing practice because of trends observed in physician practice pattern.

Home-based primary care allows health care providers to spend more time with their patients, perform assessments in a patient's home environment, and assume greater accountability for all aspects of the patient's care. "Back in the 1930s, in much more rudimentary medical times, about 40 percent of doctor-patient visits were house calls, according to a medical journal article. By 1980, house calls made up less than 1 percent of routine doctor-patient interactions," according to [a Clinics in Geriatric Medicine article](#)^(c).

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[A study in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#)^(d) found that Medicare costs among 722 elderly patients in a house call program were \$8,477 less on average per person than costs among a group that didn't receive house calls over two years. The house call group also had 9 percent fewer hospitalizations, 10 percent fewer emergency department visits and saw specialists 23 percent less. [A CMS analysis](#)^(e) found that Independence at Home participants saved over \$25 million in the demonstration's first performance year, an average of \$3,070 per participating beneficiary, while delivering high quality patient care in the home. Patients like it because there are no waiting rooms, traffic, skipped work, dragging a sick and tired body out of bed to see a doctor whose prescription is to go back to bed, and no feeling like a number, [according to an article in US News and World Report Health](#)^(f). [Los Angeles Times reports](#)^(g) that "doctors have advocated for more in-home care for seniors and the chronically ill."

Despite the benefits, there are logistical barriers to making house calls more widespread among physicians. [San Francisco Chronicle](#)^(h) reports "it is much more cost-effective to bring the patient to the doctor than the doctor to the patient." In addition, "by 2025, demand for physicians will exceed supply by a range of 46,000 to 90,000," [according to a report by the Association of American Medical Colleges](#)⁽ⁱ⁾, Further, physicians who make house calls take a hit in their paycheck, since doctors who travel to patients' homes logistically can't see nearly as many patients as doctors who have patients come to them.

However, it seems, the number of house calls has been on the rise with the availability of new communication technologies. Electronic Medical Records, smart phones, and miniaturized lab tests, and mobile imaging mean that studies normally provided through primary care offices now are generally available for use in the home. Companies like [Doctor on Demand](#)^(j) and [Heal in California, Pager in New York City, Mend in Dallas, Go2Nurse in Chicago and Milwaukee, Curbside Care in Philadelphia](#) allow patients to order doctor house calls.

STATISTICS

Physicians made 478,088 house calls in 2000; 700,661 in 2003; and 995,294 in 2006. Over the same period, the proportion of physicians making house calls decreased from 7.22 (+/- 0.20) to 5.26 (+/- 0.19). Physicians in the top decile of house call volume made an increasing number of house calls (median, 56 in 2000 and 86 in 2006), [according to a study](#)^(k). There are about 4,000 doctors who make house calls in

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the United States, according to [USATODAY](#)⁽¹⁾. For some house call doctors, it's easier to deal outside of insurance networks altogether and see anywhere from four to 18 patients a day. On the other hand, a primary care doctor in an office-based practice, might be expected to see up to 40 patients, [according to an article in US News and World Report Health](#)^(m). Only 13 percent of family physicians surveyed made regular house calls in 2013, and only 3 percent made more than two per week, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians. [American Academy of Private Physicians \(AAPP\) reports](#)⁽ⁿ⁾ that in 2012, there were 4,400 concierge doctors in the US. [MDVIP suggested](#)^(o) the national number is closer to 2,500 doctors but increasing. [An estimate](#)^(p) indicates 1,500 to 3,000 physicians nationally are offering “direct primary care.”

A study published in [the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#)^(q) compared the Medicare costs and outcomes of more than 700 patients enrolled in a house call program to a control group of more than 2,100 Medicare patients. Medicare statistics show a large bump in physician house calls, from 2.2 million in 2007 to almost 4.2 million in 2013, and account for less than 1 percent of all outpatient visits. Optum’s HouseCalls, a care management program that provides annual in-home clinical visits, employs more than 1,200 licensed physicians and nurse practitioners. In 2013, HouseCalls conducted approximately 670,000 visits in 37 states, [according to a report](#)^(r). There are about 196 listings for “[House Call Doctors](#)” in California^(s). About 7% of physicians now practice some form of direct pay/concierge medicine, while 13% indicate they are planning to transition in whole or in part to this type of practice, according to [a survey by America’s Physicians](#). It is estimates that as many as 12,000 physicians operate across the US, [according to CMTs interviews](#)^(t) with doctors, consultants and investors in the sector.

CALCULATIONS

Although data on house calling doctors is not available, based on the national approximations discussed above, it can be estimated to be about 20% of California doctors may be practicing one form or the other of house call or concierge medicine, including about 13% estimated doctors who indicate their interest in taking up this kind of practice. Currently active [physicians in California are estimated](#)^(u) to be 101,979 or [101,232, based on the total number of active physicians in 2014](#)^(v). Therefore, the number of doctors that are making house calls in California may be approximately about 2000, including about 1300 doctors who may have indicated their interest in taking up this kind of practice.

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CONCLUSION

In view of the increasing population with chronic complex multimorbidity, medical house calls are an essential component of primary and acute care for these patients, and have been shown to improve outcomes and decrease costs. Concierge medicine is a way where you pay a monthly or annual premium directly to your doctor and, in return, they become your own personal physician, taking direct responsibility for your healthcare needs. Concierge medicine is no longer a privilege of the rich like in [the TV show Royal Pains](#)^(w), as the premiums are becoming much [more affordable](#)^(x).

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AUM! SWASTI!

Om! Asatoma Sadgamaya, Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya, Mrityorma Amritamgamaya, Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih! (Aum! Lead the world from wrong path to the right path, from ignorance to knowledge, from mortality to immortality, and peace!)

SWASTI! AUM!

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