

Medical house-call business expanding

Louisville-based MD2U plans deeper coverage in 4 states, eyes adding Florida

Written by
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Dr. J. Michael Benfield is finding new business in an old practice: making house calls.

MD2U, which Benfield started in 2004, shortly after completing his medical residency at the University of Louisville, has grown to employ 43 people, including about 35 locally, by sending doctors and nurse practitioners on house calls in four states.

In Louisville, MD2U has about 2,500 patients who are seen at their homes or in assisted-living facilities. Typically, they are frail and elderly and have difficulty traveling to appointments at doctors' offices.

"It's not anything special that we are doing. The need is there," Benfield said.

Last month, the Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority approved MD2U for up to \$400,000 in state and local tax breaks based on its plan to add 24 Louisville jobs paying an average hourly wage of \$15 including benefits.

Benfield said MD2U plans to cover more markets in Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio and Louisiana and also to enter Florida, where there are more seniors and where there is more competition among house-call practices like his. MD2U will hire doctors and nurse practitioners in those states, but most of its job growth will be in Louisville, where office work such as making appointments and ordering tests is done.

Benfield said the company has outgrown its office space off Frankfort Avenue in Crescent Hill and is looking for a larger location.

MD2U is one of 12 fast-growing "High Impact Portfolio" companies that will be recognized Tuesday at an event held by the Enterprise Corp., a unit of Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce.

"With an aging population, they have capitalized on new innovative and cost-effective health care," said Lisa Bajorinas, Enterprise Corp.'s managing director.

She said MD2U is another example of Louisville's collection of companies involved in "aging care and lifelong wellness."

Benfield owns 45 percent of MD2U; his ex-wife and family members own the rest.

To maintain control of the business, he hasn't sought outside investment.

Benfield contends that house calls keep overall health care costs down by reducing hospital admissions and allowing seniors to live in their homes longer.

"We're really trying to prevent people from unnecessarily going to the emergency room," he said.

On Friday, Benfield visited 86-year-old Pat Mateja in her house off Westport Road.

He used a sensor to monitor her heart rate and the oxygen in her blood, took her blood pressure, checked her feet for sores and even poked around her freezer to take stock of her diet. (No more "Lean Pockets," he told her - too much sodium).

"I love it," said Mateja, who no longer drives much. "It is wonderful for someone my age."

While Benfield enjoys making house calls, he said his business increasingly relies on nurse practitioners, rather than doctors, to visit patients.

That's because there is a nationwide shortage of primary-care doctors, who get paid less than specialists, and it's difficult to persuade them to make house calls because they can't see nearly as many patients a day as in an office, Benfield said.

Consulting with a doctor in each market, nurse practitioners can perform many routine functions typical of primary care, such as prescribing medications, he said.

Should the business more properly be called "NP2U"?

Benfield said he stopped short of changing the name, but he has changed the slogan. It used to be "Doctors who make house calls."

Now it's "The leader in medical house calls."