

MD2U Program Helps Keep Medical Costs Down

By Abbey Doyle
Sunday, July 7, 2013

Jeff Bannister has struggled with diabetes for years making repeated visits to doctors a necessity.

The Evansville man can't drive and medical issues have made getting around difficult for the 67-year-old man.

"It was so hard for me to get to the doctor," Bannister said. "I'd struggle to get into the truck, find someone to get me out there and then have such a hard time just getting around. Now, I don't have to do all that but I'm still making sure I'm getting my medications and am doing OK."

He's been seeing nurse practitioner Jessica MacLeod for several months as part of the area's MD2U program. The in-home primary care network has been building in the tri-state area for the last six months providing ongoing in-home care for those who are homebound or home-limited. The practice locally is managed and run by MacLeod and includes the greater Evansville area, Henderson, Ky., and Owensboro, Ky.

"We are seeing people who were struggling so much go get out to the doctor and then taking three days to recover from the trip," she said. "Now patients can get the same level of care they would receive from a nurse practitioner in a doctor's office in their own home. We are able to do anything that would be done at a doctor's office."

MacLeod travels with her "tool box" that has the same diagnostic tools a doctor would use in an exam room. And MD2U partners with mobile lab companies who provide further diagnostic tests like blood work or X-rays. And all of these services are provided at no extra cost to patients. The cost of being seen at home is the same as it would be at a doctor's office, she said, pointing out that the same co-pays and fees are applied through private insurance and

medicaid as they would with a traditional doctor visit.

On MacLeod's first visit with patients she will document their need for in-home care — shortness of breath with walking a short distance, limited mobility, the use of a wheelchair or other issues that make it difficult for the patient to leave the home. Although many of her patients are elderly, MacLeod said there is no age requirement to use the services; she has one patient who is 29.

"This is more cost-effective for insurance companies and Medicaid in the long run," she said. "For those who are frail or with chronic health problems a small change can result in very serious problems."

MacLeod said if patients know they can easily be seen by a clinician when problems are small they can often avoid more serious and costly health complications that often involve ambulance, emergency room and hospital stay bills.

The average ultimate cost when an elderly person calls an ambulance is around \$23,000 as it usually results in a hospital stay. That can often be avoided through regular preventative care, MacLeod said, pointing out that a twice a week visit by a nurse practitioner at \$200 saves thousands of dollars in the long run for insurers.

Patients can retain their primary care doctor or have MacLeod, who works with a supervising physician, take over their primary care. She works closely with those primary care doctors as well as specialists. And as the practice continues to grow throughout the Tri-State, MD2U will continue to add nurse practitioners and expand the coverage area.

In addition to helping keep medical costs down, she explained that being in the home in the patient's environment allows her to see other potential concerns.

"I take in more than just medical and clinical data," MacLeod said. "I see safety issues that might create a fall; see eating concerns or if they've lost the ability to keep a clean and hygiene environment. I can make small suggestions like removing a rug or help connect them with the right agencies to get someone in the home to help clean. I see the needs and can immediately address them making people safer in their homes for a longer time."

There is someone on call with MD2U 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And although they work on an appointment system, with a small patient load MacLeod said she is typically able to see patients the very same day if they have a concern.

Kevin Hunter's mom Betty Daugherty, 83, of Evansville, is bed-ridden with several chronic health concerns.

"Before, every time we had an issue we would have to call a van to come and take her, costing nearly \$100 for every single visit," Hunter said. "And we'd have to wait an hour or more to get picked up. Now, (MacLeod) comes to the house anytime we need her. It is so much easier and Mom is so much better off. I just wish this would have been available a long time ago."

MacLeod has been a nurse for 17 years and nurse practitioner for 10 of those years, working at an Evansville family practice for 10 years before joining MD2U, which has practices throughout the country.

"This is where health care is going for seniors," she said. "Going to the hospital is the last thing most people want. We are doing everything we can to keep them healthy and at home. And MD2U gives local nurse practitioners the ability to work in their community and decide what its needs are."



PHOTO BY ERIN MCCRACKEN

Nurse Practitioner, Jessica MacLeod, talks with patient Jeff Bannister about any further health concerns

he has before leaving his house on Monday, June 12, 2013. MacLeod is part of a new business in the area that provides in home medical visits to patients who are unable to get out of their home and for frequent doctors visits. Bannister has found the service to be convenient and beneficial for him, because transportation is an issue.



PHOTO BY ERIN MCCRACKEN

Jeff Bannister gets a infection checked and redressed by nurse practitioner, Jessica MacLeod, at his northside home during a home visit on Monday, June 12, 2013. MacLeod is part of a practice called MD2U, a business which is established and Louisville, which recently started a franchise in Evansville. MacLeod visits clients in their homes who for various reason may not be able to get to doctors appointments on a regular basis.