

MEDICAL HELP AT YOUR DOORSTEP

BY AGENCY FOR INTEGRATED CARE

Elderly, chronically ill and physically challenged patients can enjoy personalised healthcare services at home, thanks to home care providers, who provide client-focused medical and nursing care, and therapy to meet patients' health and social needs, and greatly improve their quality of life.



Dr Vina Doshi, who runs a medical group of home care services, talks to the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) on why she loves what she does — bringing

specialist care to her patients' doorsteps.

Tell us about your professional background.

After getting my basic medical degree, I worked in several hospitals in a wide variety of specialities until 2001 when I obtained my specialist certification in geriatric medicine. I forayed into home care in 2010.

What inspired you to make the switch to provide home care services?

When I was a hospital-based physician, I realised that point consultation with the patient and family in the hospital is hardly adequate, especially when the patient is elderly and debilitated. There was a big gap at that time in community-based care as there were not many providers. I felt this dark hole out there, far beyond my reach, affected my patient's well-being. So, I decided to jump straight into it, by providing home care services myself. With time, I realised that hospital-based and home-based care function in silos, but are both essential in ensuring the patient's overall well-being. This gap needs to be bridged for a smooth continuum of holistic care.

How many different medical professionals serve patients in the home care sector?

Nurses do procedures such as wound dressing and changing of tubes, and train caregivers. Doctors assess and stabilise the patient's

condition. The physiotherapist focuses on ambulation and the occupational therapist works on the patient's activities of daily living, cognitive issues and home environment. While each medical professional has a stated role, cross training will allow each of them to be even more effective in caring for patients.

At the end of the day, the holistic care team has a full case discussion to determine the patient's care needs and match them to relevant services. Everyone's input is invaluable in forming the most suitable plan for the patient; case managers are pivotal in ensuring that all essential services from multiple professionals are set up to meet the patient's care needs.

What kinds of patients do you normally see?

While we have some patients in their 40s, generally our patients tend to be quite old, in their 80s to 100s, as home care services are usually engaged when the patient is frail and less mobile.

What are some challenges within the home care community that you have encountered?

Different providers provide different range of services – It is important that case managers know each service provider's service range and capabilities, so that the patient can be matched with the appropriate providers.

Access to information – Home care providers need to have the patient's previous hospital admission and care provision details to ensure effective home care for the patient. This is especially important for the frail age group who may have inadequate health literacy and may not be able to communicate this information accurately.

Access to certain controlled drugs – Most hospital policies do not allow their pharmacies to dispense controlled drugs to patients with a private physician's prescription. My team handles a fair number of patients on palliative care or with chronic pain who require such drugs. If access could be extended to home care providers, it would help the patients tremendously.

How do you feel about what you do? What brings a smile to your face at the end of the day?

I have no regrets. Working in the home care sector is gratifying on both professional and emotional levels. It's extremely satisfying to see the smile on the patient's face, hear the frail lady who sleeps most of the day say hello to me when I visit, and see caregivers become competent and confident under our guidance and training.

What does it take for one to join the home care sector?

Besides the appropriate professional qualifications such as a specialisation in geriatric medicine, you need to have lots of compassion, and be willing to travel around seeing patients, rain or shine. It helps to have an optimistic mindset.

Any advice for doctors aspiring to become home care professionals?

Dive in — you may enjoy it! No words can describe the experience, the satisfaction of helping patients.

COVERING ALL BASES

Here's an overview of the types of home care services currently available.



Home Medical

- Management of chronic medical problems and uncomplicated acute/sub-acute conditions

Home Nursing

- Nursing procedures
- Caregiver training
- Medication management
- Continence care

Home Therapy

- Physical and occupational therapy
- Speech therapy

Home Palliative Care

- End-of-life care for primarily cancer patients

Transitional Care

- Management of complex post-acute conditions

Senior Home Care

- Personal hygiene
- House keeping
- Laundry
- Medication reminder service
- Mind stimulating services
- Other personal care services

Home Help

- Meal delivery
- Escort service

To find out more about becoming a home care doctor, email gp@aic.sg