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Tuesday, Feb 27, 2007

Weston

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MEDICINE | MY HOME DOCTOR

These doctors really do make house calls

A GROUP OF SOUTH FLORIDA PHYSICIANS IS REVIVING AN HONORED MEDICAL TRADITION -- HOUSE CALLS

Special to The Miami Herald
BY JENNIFER COHEN

It is a scene reminiscent of a Norman Rockwell painting: a doctor in a white coat, medical bag in hand, knocking on the door of a patient's home.

House calls were a relic from a bygone era. But now, they're making a comeback.

My Home Doctor, a group of South Florida physicians, treats non-emergency medical conditions in the tri-county area, including fever, respiratory and ear infections, allergies and rashes, strep throat, urinary tract infections, flu, upset stomach and headaches.

"My Home Doctor was created to give adults and children access to convenient, top-quality and personalized healthcare," said Mark Price, CEO and co-founder. "Our mission is to offer medical services focused on quality time and attention, comprehensive examinations and immediate response."

Price had been working in Europe as an executive in global healthcare, where medical house calls are the norm. After returning to the United States, the father of four became frustrated waiting for hours in the emergency room.

Price noticed a gap between primary healthcare and emergency after-hours care and invested a half-million dollars to start My Home Doctor with colleague Jose Varona, vice president of marketing and sales.

The patient calls My Home Doctor and speaks with the doctor who will conduct the house call. If it is not an emergency, the doctor will visit the patient's home, usually arriving within an hour to conduct a comprehensive exam and diagnose the condition.

Payment is due after the exam. Visits begin at \$300. While there could be additional charges for more comprehensive treatment, one visit will never be more than \$600. Credit cards or local personal checks are accepted. My Home Doctor does not accept insurance, but the doctor will provide documentation that can be submitted to the insurance company for possible reimbursement.

People don't seem to mind paying for the service. They appreciate the personalized care and like that there are no surprises later, Price said. "Patients do not receive any unexpected bills from a visit to the ER 60 days later."

"People are dissatisfied with waiting for hours in the waiting room with other sick people to see the doctor for a rushed five minutes," Varona said. "My Home Doctor visits normally last an hour. There is no deadline, no rush."

The return of the house call is part of a growing movement in healthcare.

Dr. Ramsey H. Saffouri, founder of AM/PM HouseCalls, is widely considered the pioneer of medical house calls. He started his mobile practice in Miami in 1996. His group now sees patients in 22 cities nationwide.

"There has been a need for house-call medicine all along, and it's just now that doctors are finally recognizing the need," Saffouri said. "Clinics are not designed to provide the maximum amount of attention to the patient."

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Currently, My Home Doctor has seven doctors on call. All are board-certified, licensed and practice locally in South Florida. Most are multilingual. They also will go to a hotel room or office. The service is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week -- even on Christmas.

Dr. Yelena Khayut, 33, of Weston, made a house call on Dec. 25. Hailey Jones, 17 months old, was at grandmother Sue Jones' home in Weston. Hailey had a runny nose and flu-like symptoms.

Khayut arrived just after the family had opened their presents. She spoke extensively with Hailey's father, Eric Jones, and obtained the child's medical history, asking about pets, day care, sleeping and eating habits and the child's normal routine -- issues that are not normally discussed at a traditional doctor's brief appointment.

She asked if Hailey slept with a lot of stuffed animals and determined the little girl was suffering from allergies.

"I can't believe you guys are working today," Sue Jones said as Khayut checked Hailey's ears, nose and throat. "This is such a wonderful convenience. I would have been sitting in the emergency room all day on Christmas. Or I probably would have waited to take her to the doctor tomorrow. What it would have cost me in time and effort probably would have been much more than what I was charged, and the doctor came to me. You can't beat that."



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