

## A Proactive Approach to Patient Engagement

Is a crisis brewing in home healthcare? The population of the baby boomers in the U.S. is on track to exceed the 71 million mark by 2030, and those 80 or older will increase to 19.5 million, as established by research conducted by the U.S. Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

"It's a freight train coming down the tracks," said Thomas Franks, president of [Homestead Health](#).

What the sheer number poses for the healthcare industry is a future liability of enormous proportions to accommodate all those needing healthcare. Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance companies are already beginning to understand the urgency for innovation. And as innovative technologies compete, taking center stage is preventive telehealth.

"It is a move signalling the shift from a reactive healthcare environment to a more proactive approach to do whatever it takes to keep these seniors healthy, at home longer and out of the hospital as much as possible," said Franks.

Home health patients increasingly require medical and communication resources necessary to safely make their own lifestyle choices without putting an additional burden on hospitals and other healthcare agencies. This essentially translates to "being in charge of your health."

"Homestead Health is excited to be a leader of this advancement in proactive patient engagement," said Franks. "Because today, we have developed fundamental solutions that many home healthcare companies may not even realize are available," says said Franks.

As opposed to the expensive solutions in the market that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to a large healthcare company, Homestead Health brings forth a simple, low-cost yet profound value proposition anchored on "telecare". The cornerstone of home health, telecare is proven to help patients be involved with their health, ultimately increasing patient engagement and drastically reducing avoidable readmissions.



"This set us thinking," said Franks. "How can we effectively deliver medical and health assistance to the patients at home in a way that is not expensive, is easy for them to use and understand, and gets them the healthcare that they need before it becomes critical. CareCaller™, the first Proactive Telecare™ device was born." states Franks.

Home healthcare providers need to sit up and take notice. Fact is, twenty-seven percent of all thirty-day hospital readmissions are avoidable. The average cost of readmission for a patient receiving Medicare is \$13,800. CMS' Hospital Readmission Reduction Program penalizes hospitals for 30-day readmissions. A staggering 81% of hospitals suffered penalties in 2018, which translated to \$500 million or 0.3% of total Medicare payments to hospitals. This problem is inevitable. Even if CMS revamps its approach, the move to curtail healthcare costs will continue to penalize preventable readmissions.

In many cases, healthcare providers sign preferred provider agreements with home health agencies to shoulder the responsibility of caring for the chronic patients who have a higher risk of readmissions. However, there is a catch for home healthcare providers. They receive a flat amount per month, and if they are successful in keeping the patients happy and healthy at home, they can pocket the amount not spent. At the same time, if those patients are readmitted, the home health agency will have to bear the brunt of the expenses.

"If deploying relatively inexpensive telecare devices to high-risk patients can save a \$13,800 readmission, it bears serious consideration as a strategy to help patients," said Franks. The telecare solutions can measurably increase home-based patient engagement, compliance with treatment protocols, and in turn, reduce readmissions.

Levelling the playing field for home healthcare providers, Homestead Health ticks all these boxes with the CareCaller™, which is proven to alleviate risks, avoid excessive cost, maintain profitability, and reduce readmissions.

## **The Genesis**

Homestead Health is a wholly owned subsidiary of SafeGuardian, LLC which has innovated, developed and distributed medical alarms to the general public for over fifteen years. About three years ago, Homestead Health collaborated with a large home healthcare client to deploy their technology into the patients' homes to call visiting nurses. In partnership with

the client, Homestead Health conducted a pilot program, which was the genesis of designing and implementing a product line specifically for home health providers.

Homestead Health is the first help alert company to develop a patient call button - the CareCaller™ - exclusively for home healthcare providers. The CareCaller™ is a simple device for home use, and it works much like "nurse call buttons," which have been used by hospitals for decades. The company also pioneered its innovative "Call-Us-First" program and is developing materials, videos, and guidelines to help the patients make the best use of the device when they get it.



The CareCaller™ is based on a new, low-cost Proactive Telecare™ technology that increases patient engagement, reduces readmissions, and improves patient satisfaction ratings. "We developed the CareCaller™ to help patients get involved with their health because data proves that increased patient engagement is the most effective way to reduce avoidable readmissions," explained Franks.

### **What Makes CareCaller Unique?**

Be it patients, hospitals, medical centers, nurses, managed care organizations, accountable care organizations, or home healthcare agencies; everyone can use the CareCaller™.

How does the CareCaller™ simplify the job for homebound patients? The following example can break it down. "White pill or the red?" is the confusion of a wounded patient who returned from a hospital a couple of hours ago. Doubtful about the pill he was supposed to take after dinner and unable to understand the instructions given by the doctor, he presses the CareCaller™ button and is able to speak directly with his home health provider to answer his questions.

The CareCaller™ technology is truly innovative, proactive, and completely customizable. It is not a device that can only be used by a particular group of patients in a specific situation, as mentioned above. The help alert device proves effective for any patient who has chronic health issues and is discharged from the hospital, and thereafter, a home health agency takes

over the responsibility of their care. The agency assesses the patient's healthcare needs and the risk they pose for readmissions. Patients susceptible to high-risk readmissions are provided with a CareCaller™, and they are instructed and encouraged to use it.

"Given the positive impact that alert systems have on home health patients, it simply does not make sense to discharge even a single high-risk patient without giving them a CareCaller™ help alert device," stated Franks.

Simplicity is the key feature of the CareCaller™. Patients simply press the SOS button to activate the wireless CareCaller™, which then calls and sends a text notification to everyone on the pre-set contact list. The CareCaller™ has advanced communication features including a real-time GPS patient locator, fall detection technology, text messaging, and ability to make/receive calls. Depending on the patients' need, they are immediately connected to their care team to ask questions about their medical conditions, confirm medications, schedule/reschedule follow-up appointments or to request urgent nurse assistance.

"We aim to enable the patient to report medical complications or changes in condition before the patient requires advanced treatment. We give them a quick and easy way to get in touch with their caregivers," explained Franks. The CareCaller™ is the only Proactive Telecare™ device that directly calls and texts caregivers remotely and in a very cost-effective manner to address questions, concerns and urgent medical needs without the requirement for costly third-party monitoring.

### **When Pilot Program Proved Successful**

It came as no surprise when Accessible Home Health Care teamed up with Homestead Health to improve operational workflows and patient experience. Accessible Home Health Care caters to patients who choose the comfort of home over institutionalized medical care. The healthcare company wanted to explore all avenues to improve communications between their staff and patients, increase CMS customer satisfaction rating, increase the number of provider referrals, and reduce unnecessary hospital readmissions.

With the success of the pilot program, the CareCaller™ is now an integral part of Accessible Home Health Care, which has expanded the program to all their franchised home healthcare agencies nationwide.

### **A Inspired Approach to the Future**

The not-so-distant future seems exciting for Homestead Health as they prepare the ground for next-generation wearables to provide patients with easier and healthier lives at home. The planned future wearables include Help Alert Pendants and Help Alert Watches, which are currently under development. The Help Alert Pendant will be retrofitted with components for 4G LTE, Bluetooth, and Wi-Fi connectivity for better cellular services while Help Alert Watch will include built-in two-way voice, video calls, and vital signs monitoring features. "We are very excited about our next generation products that will have the ability to add additional home and health sensors to it and are currently under development," revealed Franks.

The healthcare industry is in the cusp of employing new medical devices and equipment to keep patients healthy and safe.

"Our goal in the next few years is to spread awareness of Proactive Telecare™ and work with home healthcare companies, payers and providers dedicated to offer patients a higher level of care," pointed out Franks.

Homestead Health is spearheading this movement with its CareCaller™ technology anchored on the belief that it can change a patient's life. Franks says, "When I sit back, I realize our technology is saving lives every day. That's the biggest reward we can have in this business."