

News Release

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Health department, hospital collaborate on home health services

During the past year, the Knox County Health Department and Knox Community Hospital have been in discussion regarding the availability and importance of home health services. At the heart of the discussion has been the increasing demand for home health and the ensuring patients receive the highest quality of care following a hospital stay.

After months of discussion and planning, the two entities have agreed to join forces and collaborate on a seamless transition of home health services from the health department to KCH. While the details are not yet final, the health department will continue to be an active partner with the hospital regarding home health through representation on the board which will oversee the service once the transition is completed.

Recent reforms, such as The Affordable Care Act, encourage hospitals and other agencies to coordinate the care provided both inside and outside a hospital facility. As a result, hospitals across the country are becoming increasingly involved in the delivery of home health care, especially since home health services are overwhelming driven by hospital referrals.

Currently, 90 percent of the patients referred to the health department's home health staff are KCH patients. "That referral system has worked well, but bringing the operation under one management system will enable patients to move more seamlessly from the hospital setting to the home setting," said Lane Belangia, who has served as the director of the Health Department's Home Health Division for the past four years. Belangia was recently named chief executive officer for the new Knox County Community Health Center.

The Knox County Health Department has been providing home health services since 1965. The staff of registered nurses, therapists and aides serves nearly 300 patients each year. The KCHD home health service has been honored twice in the

past three years for providing quality care as measured from the patient's point of view through the Home Health Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers Survey (HHCAPHS). The survey is part of the Medicare billing process.

When home health care became part of the Medicare program in 1966, nearly every health department in Ohio's 88 counties provided home health care. In recent years, the service has been discontinued at almost every health department in the state. Currently, the Knox County program is one of only five affiliated with a health department.

"From the Health Department's perspective, this collaborative transition will enable the home health agency to expand personnel to meet an increased demand for home health as well as increase the types of patients who are able to be served," said Belangia. "With one coordinated management system, communication between healthcare providers and home health nurses will begin earlier and be more thorough, including assessments and discussion of the care that is needed."

Patients who currently receive home health services are not likely to notice any difference in the delivery of care or in the care providers they encounter. The current home health staff is expected to stay the same and remain housed at the health department until plans for a new location are finalized. KCH is currently in the process of hiring a Home Health Director to oversee the service and has recently contracted with the Health Department to provide a registered nurse during the transition process.

"Knox Community Hospital's priority with this new venture is to ensure that the members of our community who rely on home health services continue to receive the same high-quality care they have come to rely on through the Health Department," said Bruce White, chief executive officer for KCH. "The Health Department has established a great reputation for home health in our community and we are very fortunate to have such a strong and collaborative partner to work with as we all continue to respond to changes in the healthcare landscape and a growing demand for these services."

The Health Department has sent a letter to patients announcing the transition of services "Over the past 50 years our staff has touched many lives and we have, in turn, been touched by their lives," said Health Commissioner Julie Miller. "The choice for home health services is always the right of the patient and we hope that residents continue to choose the quality home health care provided by the collaboration of the Knox County Health Department and Knox Community Hospital."

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