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She Makes House Calls



THE DOCTOR WILL SEE YOU NOW—AT YOUR HOME

Dr. Caron Houston glanced at her watch as she crossed the empty parking lot to her car. It was 8 o'clock. Somehow she'd put in another 12-hour day without realizing it. By the time she got home, it would nearly be her kids' bedtime. She worried for a moment that the new nanny was going to burn out, but she pushed the thought away as she turned the car radio to a local jazz station. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" was playing, and the image of bluebirds flying over the rainbow struck a chord with Houston.

"When it got to the part about happy little bluebirds, I thought, 'Wait a minute. I don't have to be this factory line. I could be a happy little bluebird.' I really decided at

that point that I needed to get back to the soul of what I like to do," says Houston, who has been a doctor for more than 20 years. "And that is geriatrics."

That realization came back in 2014. Since then, Houston has created a thriving home health care practice called House Calls of Carmichael. She services elderly patients who have trouble leaving the house for one reason or another and would otherwise struggle to get the medical care they need.

This concierge model of health care was inspired by several encounters Houston had while still working in a medical office. "Some patients really just are too sick to come into the office," she says. Two patients immediately came to mind for Houston: a woman who was moribund

and obese and unable to see a doctor for so long that her prescriptions were no longer eligible for refill and an elderly dementia patient who wandered out of the office while his wife was being seen. He was missing for more than four hours.

For these patients and many others Houston sees, receiving regular medical care at home brings them new quality of life.

Houston effectively brings the whole doctor's office to her patients in two suitcases packed to the brim with everything from an EKG machine to a urine-testing kit. She also maintains relationships with several other mobile medical professionals, such as a phlebotomist who draws blood for labs and a mobile X-ray team.

"I had to really find partners who had the same philosophy of care,"

she says of her quality-over-quantity approach to geriatric home care. "And I have found them. There are many people out there that have that really heartfelt approach."

While a referral to a specialist like a neurologist or a cardiologist would require the patient to go in for an appointment, not much else does. Prescriptions can often be delivered to the patient's home or picked up through a pharmacy in the patient's assisted-living community.

And while health insurance is a hot-button issue right now, Houston hasn't experienced too much pushback with her practice. For those who do not have an insurance plan like Medicare that covers house calls, the convenience and Houston's attentiveness have been well worth the out-of-pocket costs.

"I think medicine has soul," Houston says, explaining why her patients are willing to pay more to be seen by her than go to an office that prioritizes how many patients can be seen as quickly as possible. "You put your soul into it, and your patients are so vulnerable. Once it becomes a numbers game, you lose that personal touch."

For Houston, who now works from home much of the time, the decision to start House Calls of Carmichael has been just as life changing as it has for her patients.

"I really feel good about life if I'm practicing and doing what I like in terms of work, but now I can do both," she says. "I do end up staying up really late at night continuing to do my work, but I made a personal choice that I want to take care of my kids after school and actually get to see them."

For more information about House Calls of Carmichael, call (916) 245-6464 or go to housecallsofcarmichael.com.

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