For some of our sickest patients, going to the doctor’s office is a big ordeal. Two to three family members may have to go with them and then they have the same 20-minute slot as the healthy 25-year-old in the waiting room. But what’s old is new again. Doctor home visits are back, at least for the sickest, most complex patients.

The Department of Internal Medicine at Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center began a home-visit program in December. This service is targeted at Franklin County patients having trouble managing their multiple chronic illnesses.

Home visits may seem like a cost-prohibitive venture. But these patients not only are likely to be hospitalized but then also are at high risk of readmission within 30 days after discharge. As part of the federal health reform law, the Medical Center wouldn’t be paid for those readmissions.

The idea for a home visit program came up a couple years ago as physician practices were trying to earn national accreditation as patient-centered medical homes. I met with Dr. Gail Grever and asked how she thought we should create a patient-centered medical home,” says Neeraj Tayal, MD, an Internal Medicine physician. “She said: ‘I think we should see patients in their homes.’”

Tayal, part of OSU Internal Medicine at the Morehouse Medical Plaza, didn’t know if the idea would fly. He took it to his department administrator, department chair and the chief medical officer; they all agreed — this was the future.

While sifting through applications for new Internal Medicine recruits, Tayal noticed one line in the curriculum vitae of Andrew Schamess, MD. “It said: ‘I see some of my patients in home visits,’” Tayal recalls. “It wasn’t a lot, about five percent.”

Schamess, who started at the Wexner Medical Center in September, was in private practice and affiliated with the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester. “It’s not profitable, but I knew that I had patients who would benefit,” says Schamess. “I think patients appreciate the time. There’s a lot you can get done in the home visit.”

Being in a patient’s home can give a doctor a better view of the patient’s life. Patients and their family members are more apt to point out problems — “she can’t get her feet over and off the bed” or “he gets nauseous in these circumstances,” for example.

“Some people have all they need, others are struggling — they can’t cook, things are dirty,” Schamess explains. “These are the people who come in and are saying, ‘Oh, I’m fine, doctor.’”

Complex patients, with two or more chronic conditions, are often high users of medical services. This can translate into high costs. The home visit program will manage about 150 patients and is to be “high touch, high contact.”

The program isn’t expected to generate revenue through billing for services. But it should generate savings for the Medical Center under new Medicare regulations. These savings should more than cover program costs, Schamess says.

Our electronic medical records system and other advanced medical technologies have made it easy for doctors to take their office on the road.

The home visit team will include Schamess, a nurse practitioner, a social worker and nurse case manager. Students — medical, nursing, social work — also will be involved.

Nurses have done home care for a long time, but Margaret Graham, PhD, FNP, PNP, associate dean for Advanced Practice and Community Partnerships in the College of Nursing, explains that this new initiative is different. House calls take patient care management to a new level.

“We’re moving healthcare forward and trying to reduce costs,” Graham says. “We have to look at all types of alternatives in offering healthcare.”

The Ohio State team will analyze data to determine which patients benefit most from home visits. Schamess says they’ll examine outcomes 30 days after discharge first and then extend the analysis over the long term. “We’re hypothesizing that this will reduce costs,” he says.
For more than 21 years, photographer Jim Brown has shared his personal view of Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center. From the tunnels under University Hospital to the Rhodes Hall rooftop helipad and everything in between, Jim has captured images of the people, places and events that have helped create our nationally ranked academic medical center. As Jim moves into retirement, he has graciously offered us another look at a few of these memorable images. Best wishes to you, Jim!

Thanks for the memories.
‘Journey to Innovation’

Joe Meany | The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center

“My son, your purpose in life does not recognize any obstacles,” his mother would say when he became discouraged. Hagop Mekhjian, MD, had many obstacles on his way to becoming the associate vice president for Health Sciences Administration at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center. None, however, were quite like the obstacles his parents faced as they were displaced from their homes during the Armenian Genocide in 1915.

As a result of the conflict, Mekhjian’s parents, like other Armenians, relocated to Aleppo, Syria, where they had to raise their children in an Armenian ghetto. Although the circumstances were difficult, Mekhjian looked elsewhere for inspiration. “I was looking at the West really as the inspiration, where you could excel and progress,” says Mekhjian.

After earning his medical degree from the American University of Beirut, Mekhjian was ready to pursue his postdoctoral training in the United States. However, in order to travel to the US, Mekhjian had to save up enough money for a plane ticket. He did so by working for an oil company in the Saudi Arabian desert for more than two months. After acquiring enough money, Mekhjian boarded a Pan Am 707 and landed in Kenmore Square, Mass., on July 4, 1965, with nothing more than a suitcase. “That was my entire worldly possession, except for the $50 in my pocket that was left,” says Mekhjian.

Several years after arriving in the land that had inspired him, Mekhjian discovered another source of inspiration. Sewn into the inside of his jacket was a handwritten letter wrapped in cellophane from his mother. “It was faith in God and believing in the future and trusting yourself, and everything will be OK,” says Mekhjian of the letter’s contents. “It’s the only thing I have from my mother that I’ve been able to keep.”

In addition to serving as associate vice president for Health Sciences Administration, Mekhjian is also Ohio State’s chief medical officer. As a physician and faculty emeritus in the Division of Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, his clinical interests include inflammatory bowel disease and gastrointestinal endoscopy. One of Mekhjian’s first interests was intestinal absorption, specifically the effect of alcohol on the intestines.

“My first NIH grant was for the effects of alcohol on intestinal absorption,” says Mekhjian. “I like that to think that I published one of the very first papers demonstrating the deleterious effects of alcohol on the intestines, which had never been talked about before.” Mekhjian summed up his journey this way: “Doing new things has truly been a source of excitement and inspiration for me.”

See and hear Mekhjian’s journey to Ohio State at go.osu.edu/Mekhjian.

About ‘Journey to Innovation’

Diversity in people and ideas is a core value and strength of The Ohio State University and its Wexner Medical Center. The video series “journey to Innovation” shares the stories of 12 foreign-born physicians who made Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center their destination. Follow the series in Insight and online at YouTube.com/OSUMedicalCenter (search “Journey to Innovation”).

“Journey to Innovation” was made possible by a grant from the OSU Medical Alumni Society; Ismail Nabeel, MBBS, MPH, the OSU Wexner Medical Center Diversity Council, and the Department of Marketing and Strategic Communications.
Celebrate Heart Month

with Ohio State’s Ross Heart Hospital and help raise awareness for heart disease risk factors.

Take the challenge

for better heart health and get active. Visit go.osu.edu/heart for local events.

For more tips, join the conversation with #BuckeyeHearts

February 1st

is National Wear Red Day.

Be sure to put on your scarlet and spread the word about preventing heart disease!

Avoid salt

Avoid food in which large amounts of salt/sodium have been added — including frozen dinners, cured meats and lunchmeats, processed cheese foods and most canned products such as soup, vegetables and pasta sauces.

Eat fish

Have fish for dinner tonight — the American Heart Association recommends eating two servings of fish, particularly fatty fish, like salmon, per week.

30 minutes a day, five days a week, increase your heart rate through moderately intense exercise.

OR

20 minutes a day, three days a week, increase your heart rate through vigorous cardiovascular exercise.

For more information visit, go.osu.edu/heart

To make an appointment call, 614-293-5123

Avoid food in which large amounts of salt/sodium have been added — including frozen dinners, cured meats and lunchmeats, processed cheese foods and most canned products such as soup, vegetables and pasta sauces.

Wexner Medical Center