

The Daily Briefing

'Community paramedics' keep elderly Minnesotans out of the ED

First-of-its-kind program includes nine certified community paramedics

January 30, 2013

The Minneapolis Star Tribune this week spotlighted the nation's first team of "community paramedics," which launched last summer in Minnesota to keep elderly residents out of the ED through preventive services.

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The program—which is funded and run by **North Memorial Medical Center** in Robbinsdale, Minn. —allows physicians and health clinics to schedule at-home visits for patients with one of nine certified community paramedics. During the scheduled visits, community paramedics perform various services—such as blood tests or arranging meals—to ensure patients are correctly managing their chronic illness.

Barb Andrews, the program coordinator, says the idea for community paramedics developed from her experience as an emergency paramedic, where she routinely responded to calls that could have been avoided if someone had checked in on the patient to make sure they were taking their medication.

Mark Bixby, medical director of North Memorial's 12 primary care clinics, said the community paramedics act as "an extension of [doctors'] eyes and ears out into the community." He added that by visiting the patients at home, community paramedics can discover reasons patients are having trouble managing their health "that you can't do from an office." Although Bixby acknowledged that not all patients like the idea of having someone come to their home, he said there is evidence that the program has been successful at keeping patients out of the ED.

Andrews said she expects insurers to start covering the service as provisions in the Affordable Care Act begin to take effect that provide hospitals with incentives for reducing hospital visits and ambulance runs (Lerner, [Minneapolis Star Tribune](#), 1/28).

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