

Sherri Parker



Primary care at home

Sherri Parker started her career as a social worker nearly 30 years ago working with hospice patients. Now she is leading an effort to bring care into the home much earlier for older adults who have an advanced illness or disability.

Primary Care At Home is a new program from Capital Caring Health, the largest non-profit provider of elder health, chronic illness, hospice, and at-home care services for the Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. area.

“A lot of patients have difficulty getting to the doctor, and now with Covid-19, it is even harder to get to the doctor,” she says. So this old fashioned house call program, as she calls it, brings home-based medical care, including visits from a doctor, a nurse practitioner and a social worker who all specialize in geriatrics. The team can provide in-home blood work or other diagnostic tests when needed. The goal is help people stay out of the emergency room or hospital and to age in place safely by addressing health concerns early. “With our help, these patients can still get outstanding care,” she says.

Sherri works with patients and families to access community resources and she runs a biweekly caregiver support group.

This work chose me

When Sherri started college, she knew that she wanted to help people. She took classes in education and social work and in the end she “fell in love with social work.”

During one of her social work classes, she received a field assignment in the oncology wing of a hospital. She found the experience very gratifying. Since then she has worked in home-based hospice and home health, in grief and bereavement counseling, and in acute care and long-term care settings. She has been at Capital Caring for 23 years.

She helps people think through what matters most to them and how they want to live in their final years. Sherri also enjoys mentoring graduate students and inspiring the next generation of social workers. “I love what I do so much that I think it filters over to them and they decide to stay,” she says.

'We are not letting Covid-19 stop us!'

The novel coronavirus pandemic has made in-home care more challenging, but the Primary Care At Home team is still working to help older adults who need services.

“We are not letting Covid-19 stop us,” she says.

Sherri and the rest of the team are getting creative to make sure patients can access the care they need. In some cases, the team sends smartphones to patients who don't have them so they can connect through Zoom. And they still visit patients and their families in person when necessary. She visits one patient at home who is blind, for example, and also calls her to check in by phone.

“We use PPE and we can stay safe,” she says.

After months of quarantining, in-person home visits can be really energizing, she says. Sherri recalls the joy she felt after visiting with a patient who lives alone and struggles with technology. It was a bittersweet farewell.

Before Covid-19, she would sometimes hug her patients goodbye, she says. Now she can't do that. Instead, when she went outside the door, she removed her face shield and mask, so her patient could see her face and the emotion in her smile and tried to connect with her through the window. “With technology we can do a lot, but nothing can replace a hug.”

At home, she recharges with gardening. She took a recent trip with her husband to the beach, and she loves spending time with her family. Sherri is excited for the future and doesn't see herself stopping this work anytime soon.

“Some people go to a job and come home but this isn't that. It is more like I can't imagine doing anything else that would bring me this much fulfillment. I feel like I make a difference everyday,” she says.