

**News from
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For Immediate Release: August 31, 2009

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Rep. Arcuri Joins At Home Care of Oneonta on Home Health Patient Visit to Demonstrate Importance of Medicare Home Health Services

As federal health reform debate continues, Rep. Arcuri calls for support of home health care

Amid Congressional debate over national health care reform, Rep. Michael Arcuri (D-24) today joined staff from At Home Care, an Oneonta-based home health agency, on a visit to the home of 85-year-old patient Francis Pusateri to demonstrate the importance of Medicare home health services.

Mr. Pusateri, a patient of At Home Care, suffers from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and heart failure. He has been hospitalized multiple times for respiratory disease in recent months and requires a cane or walker for mobility.

So that he can remain safely at home, Mr. Pusateri relies on Medicare-covered in-home physical therapy and nursing services recently ordered by his physician to treat and monitor his chronic condition, and to help end a past cycle of repeat hospitalizations.

Rep. Arcuri said patients like Mr. Pusateri are a testament to the importance of home and community-based services in providing cost-effective, patient-centered care.

“During the past month I’ve traveled throughout the district to hear constituent views about health care reform,” Rep. Arcuri said. “Though opinions are wide ranging, we all can agree that health care can and should be more efficient and that patient choice is paramount. Home and community-based services have already succeeded in living up to these goals. For the sake of patients like Mr. Pusateri who depend on home care, we must protect existing services that are helping patients stay out of the hospital and remain safely in the community.”

As a supplement to traditional home health services, At Home Care has installed a home telehealth unit inside Mr. Pusateri’s home. The technology allows for video monitoring of patients and/or remote transmission of vital signs to the agency’s central offices where the information is reviewed by nursing staff.

“Home telehealth is a powerful and exciting disease management tool that improves patient health outcomes by increasing the visibility of potential health risks through remote video monitoring or data links,” said Laurie Neander, At Home Care’s CEO. “Catching the warning signs earlier increases our chances of responding – through adjustments to a patient’s medication or other interventions – before a health condition worsens.”

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A sudden gain in weight, spike in blood pressure, or sign of breathing difficulty can be captured by video or data-monitoring systems, prompting immediate action and reducing the chance of hospitalization. For patients with COPD and congestive heart failure who are undergoing home telehealth monitoring, like Mr. Pusateri, At Home Care has seen a 10-to-14-percent drop in rehospitalization rates.

Home care's ability to reduce a patient's chances of reentering the hospital – aided by powerful tools like home telehealth – is not only beneficial to the patient's health and well-being, it's also good health care policy, Ms. Neander said. In fact, a study by economist Robert Litan last year found that widespread use of remote-monitoring systems could cut the nation's health care costs by \$197 billion in the next 25 years.

Ms. Neander said she is very concerned about the impact on patient care of approximately \$56 billion in Medicare home health cuts nationally over ten years under the U.S. House of Representatives' health reform package.

“Extending health coverage to the uninsured is a laudable public health goal,” Ms. Neander said. “However, any further Medicare cuts to home health services as part of a reform bill will only turn back the clock on existing strides in health reform by reducing access to needed, cost-effective care for elderly and disabled patients, especially in rural and underserved areas of the state where a single home health agency may be serving multiple counties.”

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