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## HEALTH AND FITNESS

# Centers for Families and Children offer pharmacist home visits (photos, video)



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**BY JULIE WASHINGTON, THE PLAIN DEALER**

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Grocery bags filled with outdated prescription bottles, insulin left on a counter instead of being refrigerated properly, and a kitchen loaded with sugary foods instead of fruits and vegetables.

These are the kinds of impediments to good health a doctor will never see. But they can be discovered and corrected by visiting pharmacists from the Centers for Families and Children, an organization that offers health care, counseling, wellness classes and more to 20,000 clients annually.

Home visits by its pharmacists are one way that the Centers for Families and Children offer integrated care, said Alexa New, senior vice president for strategic initiatives and external affairs.

The Centers' visiting pharmacists get to know the families they see, and the close relationship means that clients will tell the pharmacist things that they won't say to their doctor, said T.J. Grimm, director of pharmacy operations at the Centers for Families and Children.

"You'll never learn more about someone than going into their home," Grimm said.

The Centers aim to serve the mentally ill and families with low incomes, New said. These are people who often struggle to read and understand prescription labels, or have transportation problems that make doctor appointments hard to keep. For them, a visiting pharmacist can be a lifeline.



The organization has 14 locations - including five pharmacies -- across Northeast Ohio. Home pharmacy visits began in 2013 when the organization's pharmacists noticed that clients needed help managing a range of health problems beyond mental illness. A Centers for Families and Children case manager or health provider can suggest home visits for selected clients, which occur weekly or monthly.

"We've seen an increase in healthy outcomes" since then, New said. About 800 Centers clients yearly get home visits.

While refilling pill organizers for clients may seem like a simple task, it's important for revealing whether a person is skipping doses and for reinforcing the important message that pills must be taken on schedule for best results.

Bettie DuLaney, 63, says she no longer skips pills for diabetes, high blood pressure, anxiety and other health problems because pharmacist Evan Wright's visits to her Rocky River apartment twice a month keep her on track.

"I can feel a mood swing coming on if I forget to take my meds," DuLaney said.

Wright helped DuLaney lose weight since he started visiting her four years ago, and he frequently quizzes her on what drugs she takes and what they do. "She's come a long way with that," he said.

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Pharmacists also can advocate for clients in order to resolve problems, such as in the case of client with schizophrenia, asthma and diabetes who often skipped his asthma meds. Grimm asked the man's doctor to change the asthma prescription so the client could take the schizophrenia and asthma pills at the same time of day, which was easier for him to remember.

That kind of troubleshooting is something that the visiting pharmacists often do, Grimm said.

Lauren Miller, a clinical pharmacist with the Centers for Families and Children, offered to handle change-of-address forms for the prescriptions that Brian, 45, takes for his medical conditions. Brian and his mother Peggy recently moved from Cleveland to Parma.

During a recent home visit, Miller refilled Brian's weekly pill counter and checked the readout on his blood glucose monitor. "How was your diet this week?" she asked.

Brian, who did not want to use his last name or diagnoses, admitted he had eaten a lot of fast food because the house move didn't leave his family much time to cook. Miller reminded him to stick to diet soda and leave the cigarettes at home when he goes to work.

Under Miller's gentle urging, Brian has lost weight and is taking his medications regularly, which gives his mother some peace of mind.

"It saves a lot of fights about taking his meds," said Peggy, 78. "She's somebody he listens to."

Miller, who has been visiting Brian weekly for about two years, sees her role as coordinating care between the different doctors Brian sees.

"They're comfortable with telling you what's going on," she said about the 10 clients she visits. "They tell you things they won't tell their doctor."

**Contact the Centers for Families and Children at 216-325-WELL to get services.**

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