

# Uvalde Leader-News

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## Medicare program provides for house calls

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STAFF WRITER

Juan Ruiz used to drive a big truck, but his life changed completely when the pain in his legs finally made him stop.

With the pain came severe depression. Diabetes reared its ugly head and somewhere in the midst of rapidly accumulating health problems he had a heart attack.

This was the story physician assistant Kaye Kendall learned as she made a house call on Ruiz Wednesday afternoon. Kendall's visit was provided as part of a Medicare Advantage Part D plan paid for through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

She is an employee of Care Improvement Plus HouseCalls program, which sends medical professionals into the homes of individuals living with chronic health conditions or low-income individuals who may qualify for both Medicare and Medicaid.

Visits are slated once a year to assess the patient's needs and help them meet those needs or find help in meeting those needs, she said.

The program also helps coordinate health care among the patient's different providers, but does not try to replace the role of the patient's regular doctor.

"I'm here to see if there's anything we can do to keep you out of the hospital and get your medicine to you and see if there's anything at all

we can do to help you," Kendall told Ruiz.

Ruiz explained some of the medical problems he has been dealing with while Kendall checked his medications and gave him necessary information about each one — such as what medications can be taken at the same time as

others and which should be taken a few hours later.

When asked about his ability to pay for his medicines, Ruiz said he has been having trouble paying for some. "I stopped taking one medication," he said. He said he goes to buy medicines and just doesn't have the money for all he needs, so he doesn't buy the one he thinks he can buy without for a while.

Ruiz also told Kendall all the device he uses for checking his blood sugar is not working and that he has been unable to buy the test strips anyway.

Kendall made a phone call and arranged for another blood sugar monitor, with test strips, to be sent by Priority Mail. She also set up a system that will allow Ruiz to get



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Juan Ruiz watches as physician's assistant Kaye Kendall takes his blood pressure Wednesday as part of the Care Improvement Plus HomeCare program which provides an annual visit by a health care professional to help patients stay healthy enough to stay out of the hospital.

new test strips on a regular basis without cost to him.

"With Care Improvement Plus, the idea about insurance is different," she said. "In a special-needs plan, we mostly insure diabetics and congestive heart failure patients."

She explained that 25 percent of the Medicare population has one or both of these conditions and accounts for 85 percent of what Medicare pays out.

"Most of the expense in in the hospital," she said. "If we can keep them healthy and it keeps them out of the hospital, that's good."

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