It's Nice to Be Appreciated, But...

The world is discovering the value and "beauty" of home care of all types, and now everyone wants to benefit and perhaps profit from such services! It's awfully nice to be appreciated, but some of the proposals "to get on board the home care train" cause concern, at least initially.

For example, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) posted Advisory Opinion No. 10-03 on March 6, 2019, which permits hospitals to provide free, in-home follow up care to discharged patients. During home visits, paramedics employed by the hospital will provide the following services:

- Review patients' medications
- Assess patients' need for follow-up appointments
- Monitor patients' compliance with discharge plans of care or patients' disease management
- Perform home safety inspections
- Perform physical assessments; including checking patients' pulse and blood pressure, listening to patients' lungs and hearts, checking wounds, performing electrocardiograms, drawing blood and running blood tests using portable blood analyzers, and administering medications

This model of post-discharge care raises key questions, such as whether the above activities are within the scope of practice of paramedics and whether hospitals must be licensed as home health agencies in order to provide these services. The answer to these questions is likely to depend upon state requirements.

It is clear, however, that these activities are within the scope of practice of registered nurses (RNs) and therapists utilized by home health agencies. So, why don't hospitals contract with home health agencies to provide post-discharge services instead of paramedics?

Now, along comes UPS, also known as "Big Brown," with an idea about to get on the home care bandwagon! UPS recently announced that it plans to enter the home care industry by sending nurses to vaccinate adults in their
homes. First, it is important to acknowledge that it's not entirely clear what UPS plans to do from press coverage. Here is what Reuters reported:

Workers at the 1.7 million-square-foot UPS healthcare complex will package the vaccines and ship them to more than 4,700 UPS stores. At those stores, a home health nurse who is contracted by a UPS clinical trial logistics unit, called Marken, will gather the vaccines and transport them to the patient's home. The nurses will administer the vaccines in the home.

The above information raises a number of issues such as whether UPS will use nurses from home health agencies to vaccinate patients. If not, must UPS become a licensed home health agency in the states in which it provides this service? And let's not forget that home health agencies have provided flu vaccines for many years!

It's encouraging to receive greater recognition of the value of home health, but home care providers are the best at providing home care services of all kinds. They're the pros! It seems reasonable to expect those who want to get on board the home care train to use the pros to do so.

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