

## **PRINT-OSF Digital Hospital Patients in Rockford area say it's the best medicine** ***New program allows hospital-level care in the patient's home***

On the same day Congress was asked to extend a federal waiver for hospital-at-home programs, Audrey Paesani, 85, was celebrating the care she received in just such a program through OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center in Rockford, Illinois.

Health systems, including OSF HealthCare, want the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to extend for five more years the Acute Hospital Care at Home waiver program to allow payment for at-home, hospital level care such as what's being offered through [OSF OnCall](#), the digital arm of OSF. The additional time would allow health systems to continue to build out logistics, supply chains and staffing and gather enough data to convince lawmakers at-home hospital care is safe, cost-effective and patients love it.

Paesani, who has [COPD](#) and a heart condition, was recently discharged from the [OSF OnCall Digital Hospital](#) program which she called, "an impossible dream." She received regular in-person visits from a team of nurses who answered questions, took vitals, dispensed medication and made sure she had enough portable oxygen. An OSF OnCall provider overseeing her care checked in with virtual visits twice daily while Paesani enjoyed being home with her dog and having three meals delivered daily to her home from the hospital.

The one-time marketing coordinator lives alone but enjoyed her family being able stop by so easily each day without having to navigate parking decks and long walks down endless hospital hallways.

Robert Thornton, 78, of Belvidere just outside of Rockford spent five days receiving hospital-level care in the home he shares with his wife, Nancy. He had COVID and pneumonia, in addition to his COPD. His trip to the hospital was scary but his trip back home for a five-day stay in the Digital Hospital program was far better than he expected.

"I couldn't ask for more polite, well educated, concerned people to come into my house and make sure that I had what I needed to get well. It was a wonderful experience."

After passing both clinical and social screenings at the hospital, Thornton authorized the OSF OnCall team to set up all the equipment he would need at home to communicate and receive treatment. That includes a personal emergency response system which rings to the OSF OnCall Command Center for a nurse to respond to, triage and send an ambulance if necessary. Think of it as the call light in a hospital, only with someone monitoring it remotely at all times.

Thornton was visited by a field team of a nurse and nursing assistant, in addition to the twice-a-day virtual visits via a tablet that he didn't even have to turn on and off.

"They came in three to four times a day to ensure that I took my medicine, that I had blood tests done, that I conversed with the main office via phone, and to give me my IVs and to see that everything went smoothly ... that I was progressing towards the final goal of being better."

Navigating the equipment was easy for Thornton and his wife who recommend the program to anyone who qualifies. He points out a month ago, he was winded climbing just a few steps to get into his house. Now, he can manage that without a problem. His advice, "Just go for it."

[Research](#) to date shows patients in digital hospital programs recover faster, experience fewer falls and hospital acquired infections. OSF OnCall Digital Care Manager Melissa Meier, MSN, RN says the model also increases capacity to provide acute-care without additional costs. As patients are brought home, it frees up beds within the medical center for the most critically ill patients.

Courtney Dahnert, MSN, RN, supervisor of Clinical Digital Care for OSF OnCall Digital Hospital in Rockford, says the care team at the OSF OnCall Command Center will identify patients aged 18 and older who could be enrolled. Criteria includes their diagnosis, condition stability, whether their insurer offers coverage, and they must live within 30 minutes of OSF Saint Anthony.

Dahnert loves the return to a more personalized approach that includes Bluetooth enabled devices for patient-specific data which offer valuable insights into how the patient is doing, allowing proactive interventions. Personalized care plans for digital hospital patients are developed around individual routines – even must-see TV shows.

“It takes us back to being able to provide that really good care; getting to know someone even though we're only caring for them for two or three days and making their health relevant to them. And it gives us time to breathe. So it's an amazing opportunity for both the patient and the provider.”

OSF was the first provider of hospital-at-home care in Illinois and has served more than 400 patients since the program was launched in 2022 in Peoria. CMS is currently gathering comments about hospital-at-home and will make recommendations to Congress this fall about whether to extend the waiver program, make it permanent or end it.