

Overnight home health care for solitary elderly patients who come home alone after major surgery – A proposal.

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Public hearing Monday, Feb. 26, 10 a.m., Room 228 at Maine State House

From: John Hale of North Monmouth

Rep. Bill Bridgeo, D-Augusta

For: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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What we are respectfully proposing is to fill a glaring lack of a home health care Medicare/Medicaid benefit for solitary seniors who live alone. This is for people older than 60 or 65 who return to their homes, usually too soon, after major surgery such as joint replacements (probably done too often now) to recover at home. Maine is finally providing outstanding home health-care coverage for such needs as physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and Meals on Wheels. Waiting lists have been trimmed and home-health care programs are flourishing all over the state, but that is during the day. THERE IS NOTHING to stay with the patient overnight.

Many states offer some version of overnight home health care for the elderly. Some say this would cost too much. But think of the savings that could quickly be made in preventing fall-related deaths and injuries. In 2021, there were 325 deaths from falls in Maine among seniors and the death rate was 128 per 100,000 older adults. The rate of deaths and serious injuries from falls has been steadily increasing, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

Maybe worse than death are injuries such as concussions, broken pelvises and backs and broken ribs. Most of us know of a friend or relative who has suffered greatly from falling.

The simple benefit of having a caregiver in the home overnight for perhaps 2 weeks after surgery could save many deaths and awful, life-shortening injuries when, for example, a disoriented patient tries to get up and go to the bathroom, but falls.

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