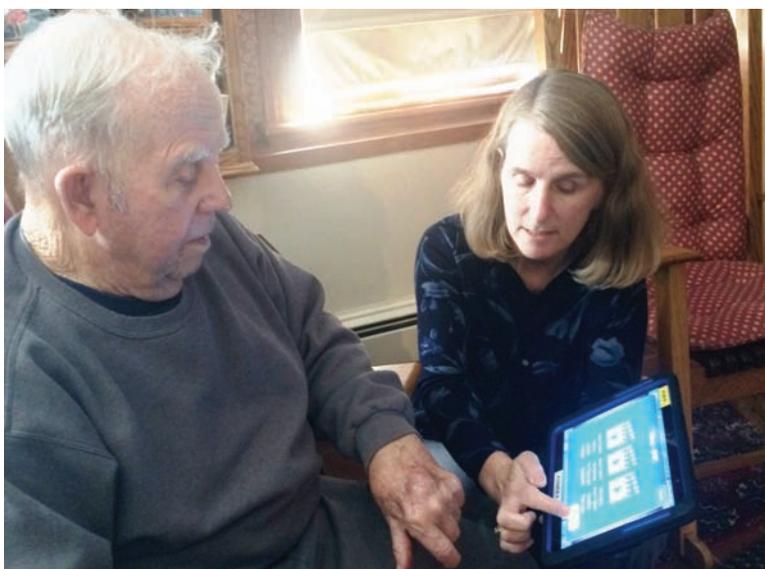


A Day in the Life of a Telehealth Home Healthcare Aide

MIA MILLEFOGLIE, MA

Home healthcare aides (HHAs) stand a million strong and serve to support the core of our work—helping our patients regain health and independence. They help patients with the activities many of us take for granted: bathing, grooming, eating, dressing, or simply getting out of bed. Their work is provided with a dignity that comes from compassion, serving individuals challenged with serious chronic disease, cognitive impairments, or physical limitations. Employment of HHAs is projected to grow 38% from 2014 to 2024, a rate much faster than the average for all occupations (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Those of us working in the home healthcare industry need to find creative solutions to expand our ability to care for a growing population of older adults with complex medical and chronic care needs. These challenges, coupled with scarce clinical resources, put a new spotlight on the role and value of today's HHAs.

Across the country, home healthcare agencies are adapting new technologies designed to extend clinical services, expand access, and improve patient outcomes. In surveying this evolving landscape, it prompted me to consider the role of our HHAs today and what the opportunities are for the future. And with this goal in mind, I spent the day with Laura Mayberry to learn more



about her work as an HHA and the role she now holds with our agency's new Telehealth Program.

We start our day talking about why she chose this career path. Laura shares, "This wasn't my career path—I worked in human resources for 15 years. My mother became ill with heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. As she became sicker and I continued to care for her, she kept saying I should be doing this work. Eventually her illness brought her to hospice care. Two weeks after my mom died, I quit my job and enrolled in a Certified Nurses Aide Course." Laura smiles remembering such a dramatic transition in her life and I remark, "Your mom brought you to this path." Her vivid blue eyes sparkle.

Laura continues to share her early days working as an

HHA, "My first job was in a group home for Down's syndrome and Alzheimer patients and then I went to a hospital working on orthopedic floors and caring for patients with heart failure. Three years ago, I came to HomeHealth Visiting Nurses and it was the best move I have ever made...I never looked back! I love that I can schedule my time, relax and individually take care of each patient. I had no idea that people could be so debilitated and remain at home. I remember one patient with multiple sclerosis. She was a high-powered attorney and now is totally bedbound. She could only move her head slightly from side to side. I learned if I could simply meet her request of positioning the food tray or straightening her sheets exactly the way she wanted them, I would be doing her a service

and help her maintain some control.”

I am struck and rather humbled when Laura tells me, “HHAs help people do things that none of us want help with.... and it’s bologna when we say we don’t get attached.” She looks at me and says, “How can you care for someone without caring for them?”

With this attitude, it’s no wonder her supervisor Heather Lomax says, “Laura is an invaluable asset to the Telehealth Team. She provides the necessary education when introducing the telehealth equipment in patient homes and empowers them to be involved on a higher level in their healthcare. She has a way of relating to patients that puts them at ease and makes them feel comfortable with the technology.”

We leave my office and walk over to the Telehealth station and greet our two Telehealth nurses who are immersed in monitoring 100 patients today. As Laura packs the equipment for our first home visit, I ask how she came to this position. “I saw that telehealth was a valuable part of the care plan and I became fascinated with the technology.” Timing was perfect as HomeHealth Visiting Nurses transitioned to a new generation of technology through Health Recovery Solutions that offered 4G tablets, bluetooth peripherals, customized educational videos, and ability to conduct video visits. Without hesitation, we knew Laura was the right person for the job.

As we drive to the patient’s home, Laura shares that at

first, it was overwhelming to learn about tablets, bluetooth, and video connections! “Now, my job is to get patients over their fear of the technology!” We arrive at the patient’s home and Laura warmly greets Mr. Smith (pseudonym) who is seated in his hand-made rocker engraved with “Grandpa” that mirrors the matching rocker he made for his wife engraved with “Grandma.” Mr. Smith is 93 years old, with heart failure, sleep apnea, and atrial fibrillation.

I sit off to the side and observe Laura with her patient as she presents the tablet. There’s a bit of panic showing in Mr. Smith’s face but Laura responds quickly by placing the pulse oximeter on her finger to show him how it sends the reading. She then asks Mr. Smith to step on the scales and within seconds his weight is clearly visible on the tablet’s screen. “See, you don’t have to enter anything. Just keep it few days and give it a try. If you don’t like it I will take it away,” Laura adds, “there’s nothing you can do wrong.”

Laura continues her teaching by explaining the different icons that can provide immediate access to our agency, tech support, or a family caregiver 24 hours a day. Mr. Smith is relaxing now and ready to learn more. Laura clicks to the assessment questions that are tailored for his conditions. He is taught to answer questions about how he is feeling, if his ankles are swollen, or if he is short of breath She emphasizes that a nurse will be looking at his responses everyday and will

call if there is a problem. Now, Mr. Smith is asked to click around the screen and open the videos. He breaks out into a big smile when the video on heart disease comes on the screen! Mr. Smith exclaims, “Before I didn’t know what swelling meant. Now I know how to keep my swelling down. This program is great. It will help to keep me home, where I want to be.” We say good-bye with Laura reassuring the patient she is only a “click” away!

In 1 year, Laura Mayberry has been instrumental in helping more than 300 patients gain the tools and knowledge to manage their chronic illness. Rohan Udeshi, Chief Operating Officer of Health Recovery Solutions shares, “Laura has a natural desire to help others and an unwavering commitment to her patients. This, combined with her keen ability to navigate telehealth technologies, empowers her to excel in her field and gives patients an effortless and pleasant experience.” Because of HHAs like Laura, telehealth patient satisfaction measures 3.89 out of a possible 4. Laura, Thank you. ■

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