Doc stabs at the heart of family medicine

BY GERARD T. HIRSCH
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Theresa Sacchi's is too young to remember the days when the family doctor would pack up his stethoscope and satchel, hop in his horse and buggy and head out across the countryside to make house calls at isolated homesteads and farms, sometimes spending the night at the bedside of an ailing patient.

But she's taking a yellowed page out of the storied medical book of yesteryears in an effort to restore some old-fashioned values to the doctor-patient relationship.

A family practitioner, she is one of the few doctors in Hunterdon County that makes house calls on a regular basis.

"I wanted to get back to the heart of family medicine which is patient-focused instead of doctor centered," she explained. "Part of that is going to see the patient in their environment, to bring medicine back to the patient where they live."

"It's not commonly done," she continued, "but the origin of family practice was always house calls. I saw a need for that in this county, the medical system is very good but the transportation for homebound people is very limited. We have a lot of elderly who are homebound and are afraid to drive at night, mobility is a huge problem."

Sacchi, a native of Bergen County, did her residency at Hunterdon Medical Center in Flemington from 2003 to 2005, when she became a licensed physician, she worked for a little over one year in a private practice.

"I decided at that point to go out on my own. I just didn't like the rush of modern medicine where patients get a short amount of time to see their doctor because insurance dictates that," she explained.

She honored a restrictive covenant signed when she left the practice, which prohibited her from practicing medicine in Hunterdon County. She worked for a few other doctors in other counties, bidding her time, until she was able to open Annandale Family Practice in Clinton Township earlier this year.

She visited various social service agencies that put her in touch with patients that required home visits, and slowly the home-based patient list began to grow.

"October was very busy, that's our sixth month mark," Sacchi said. "Word of mouth has really helped. I think people are happy to have a different approach to medicine and appreciate having a doctor who is more connected."

She counts as many as two dozen home-based patients, with several more at two nursing homes she visits on a regular basis, Country Arch in Franklin Township and Rolling Hills in Clinton Township.

Annandale Family Practice, located at 56 Payne Road, Suite 31 in Clinton, is also open for office visits by appointment five days a week and every other Saturday.

She lives in Flemington with her husband, who is an Emergency Medical Technician with the Flemington-Brunswick First Aid and Rescue Squad.

"I do have an active office-based practice," she said. "The attention to home care and the homebound. All of that I think is considered a variation on what most family doctors do," she said.

"Not everyone wants a doctor to come to them, it's not something everybody likes but there are people in the community who it works well for, who might otherwise go without medical care or treatment," she said.

"For many people, especially the elderly, there's a lot of anxiety about going to a doctor's office where it's a quick 15 or 15 minute glimpse at their life; it's hard to get to know someone that way. There's not a lot of extra time to spend with them."

Dr. Theresa Sacchi, left, sits with Mildred Delisanti of the Annandale section of Clinton Township, one of her home care patients.

DOCTOR FROM PAGE 1

There are many advantages to being in the home setting.

"I actually have a better understanding of why my patients make the decisions they do, they have more open communication with me, they call me by my first name," she said. That comfort level, trust and confidence goes a long way, according to Sacchi.

"That connectiveness with my patients is the biggest reward," she said. "I try to give them my full attention; I try to do my best for that patient at that moment."

"They know that somebody cares and pays attention to them," she added. "You can see it in their eyes; they're thankful for the time you spend with them, that's the gratification."

PLEASE SEE DOCTOR, PAGE 3