

House Calls

Dr. Cindy Pinson still visits patients in their homes and was recently named “House Call Doctor of the Year” by the American Academy of Home Care Physicians

By Carter Taylor Seaton

Old-fashioned medicine is back in style in parts of West Virginia, Kentucky and Ohio, thanks to Dr. Cindy Pinson, CEO and president of Travel MD. She founded the Huntington-based medical practice in 2005 to provide health care the way it used to be delivered: in peoples’ homes. Now, with nine providers – five doctors and four nurse practitioners – Travel MD sees over 400 primarily aging patients a month in their homes, and provides compassionate service to 20 assisted living facilities, five personal care homes and nine nursing homes. Pinson is also the Medical Director of the Woodlands Retirement Community.

Born and raised in China, Pinson came to the United States to pursue higher education and graduated from Marshall University with a B.S. degree before earning her medical degree from the Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine. There she was introduced to family medicine as a third year resident and the die was cast.

“The family physicians I encountered exuded warmth, kindness, gentleness, humor, meekness, love and respect for their patients, unlike anything I had ever seen before,” she says. “I was immediately drawn to them and wanted to be with them, and to be like them.”

That desire drove her to leave a lucrative position with a local hospital and to create Travel MD.

“I really like people and like to be with them. I like the connection that we have – the unique relationship the patient and the doctor share, not just talking about their illnesses, but telling me about normal stuff that you talk about with your friends,” she says.

She longed for that kind of bonding and could see it wasn’t possible in her current situation. Additionally, she’s a leader who likes to have her own ideas and to implement them. Hard to do when you work for a large institution.

When an ad about a practice of house call doctors in a trade magazine caught her eye, she called.



Pinson sees over 400, primarily aging, patients per month as well as providing services to assisted living and nursing homes.

After hiring the company as consultants, she made the break and established her new business. Realizing that dream wasn’t easy, however. Her household income was cut in half while she struggled to build the practice, but she credits her husband Matt, with making it bearable.

“He never discouraged me, even when times were so hard we couldn’t afford Christmas,” she says. “He has always been the backbone for my confidence and drive.”

While her business grew, she moonlighted, often working more than 80 hours a week at sever-

al different jobs. Thankfully, Pinson says, it grew exponentially from the first month when she saw only 11 patients. Now, it takes 13 staff members to manage the duties in Travel MD’s offices on the sixth floor of the Frederick Building. She expects to see even more growth in the future.

“The need is really great,” she says.

Because of the country’s aging population – the number of those 65 and older is predicted to double in the next 20 years – Pinson is committed to serving this sometimes-frail population. For the most part, her patients are within this age group,



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with many 80 and older. Some, she says, because of their frailty, have not seen a doctor in several years unless an emergency has sent them by ambulance to the hospital. Travel MD helps prevent that.

“We try to keep them at home and we do a really good job. We can show up with help anytime they want,” she says.

Patient Kenneth Sexton echoes that.

“When I was at my sickest, the calendar didn’t matter. She came three or four times a week,” he says.

Pinson and her team provide good coordination of care between Travel MD’s patients and their caregivers and families by bringing the resources of other agencies to them so their needs are met at home.

“I feel they have a better quality of life,” Pinson says, “and they really live longer.”

For her dedication and compassion, the American Academy of Home Care Physicians named Pinson the 2013 House Call Doctor of the Year. Carrying her black bag with a stethoscope, thermometer and blood pressure cuff tucked inside, she still works 70 to 80 hours a week seeing her patients.

“You don’t need a whole lot to be out there because people just need you; they really just need you, not all this fancy equipment,” she says with a wide smile.

According to Dr. John Walden, Chairman of the Department of Family Medicine at Marshall’s med school, “Cindy exhibits a degree of compassion and giving I’ve seldom encountered in my 42 years of medical practice. She is the true embodiment of generosity and servitude.”

As the first female physician to create a medical practice devoted to making house calls, she’s fulfilled her dream, brought the past into the present and perhaps set a standard for the future.

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CARTER TAYLOR SEATON is a freelance writer living in Huntington. Her debut novel, *Father’s Troubles*, was published in 2003. In 2011, she published her second novel, *amo, amas, amat...an unconventional love story*. Her non-fiction work about West Virginia’s back-to-the-land artisans, *Hippie Homesteaders*, is slated for a spring 2014 release. Currently, she is writing a biography of West Virginia’s former congressman, Ken Hechler.



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