

## Fishers Fire and Emergency Services launches groundbreaking health monitoring program

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Fishers Fire and Emergency Services is planning to launch a new groundbreaking health monitoring and education program that is the first of its kind in Central Indiana. The innovative WeCare program, which brings together the resources of the Fire Dept., Community Health Network and social services organizations, is already being emulated by other communities.

WeCare is a program in which existing paramedics within the Fishers Fire and Emergency Services receive specialized training to conduct in-home patient assessments and provide resources and preventive services to residents of Fishers.

The department is working with Community Health Network on the pilot program which is awaiting approval from the Fishers Town Council at its next meeting on Sept. 15.

Fishers' Fire Chief Steve Orusa is excited about WeCare.

"We think this program will help the health and wellness of our community in the city of Fishers and will help control healthcare costs. With all the changes in healthcare reform, there's a lot of emphasis on prevention and continuation of care once a patient leaves the hospital. Those are two gaps in health care that we're going to try to fill with our service," he said. "I think we've built a program that is going to really break new ground and that people are going to copy throughout the country."

WeCare encompasses four areas: Free blood pressure monitoring, free in-home safety evaluations, vaccinations for at-risk members of the community and free in-home follow-up of patients discharged from the hospital to monitor medication and other factors that cause hospital re-admittance.

Keeping patients from having to be readmitted to the hospital is one of the key parts of the new program according to EMS Chief Steve Davison [pictured] who heads up WeCare.



"Besides our normal training as paramedics, we go out and do evaluations everyday on emergency situations, so this will be the first for us to go in and do patient evaluations after they are discharged from the hospital," said Davison. "One of the issues with readmission to the hospital is medication errors. And by helping alleviate those questions that they have, or the fact that they may have taken them mistakenly, we can help reduce some of those readmissions as well."

Davison said right now WeCare will follow up on patients with congestive heart failure and eventually other conditions will be included in the program.

"We'll be looking at people with COPD, diabetics, people that have been discharged for certain conditions; say hip replacements, and as the landscape changes with the Accountable Care management, everything is pretty much going to be out there at some point to where we will follow up on practically any patient who is not covered by Medicare or Medicaid for home healthcare. That is what our role is going to be; to catch those people that are not covered by normal home healthcare," he said.

The department is currently working with Community Health Network but will expand to include other hospitals in the future. Shelley O'Connell, the director of Community Health's Touchpoint Integration program, which handles geriatric services, said there is nothing like the WeCare program in the area or the region.

"It adds another level of connectivity to our patients. It adds another level of follow-up for our patients to ensure that they are successful when they go home. And it also helps identify if there are other needs to connect them to make sure that they are successful when they are home that helps keep them safe and helps keep them on track for improving their overall health," she said.



Community Health coordinated the training for the paramedics and brought in experts from various areas.

"We tried to be very comprehensive. The Fishers Fire Dept. already brings an expertise of doing the in-home evaluation to look for safety measures. Do they have fire extinguishers? Do they have smoke detectors in the right places of their home? Are they able to walk through their home safely? Are there rugs or chairs or furniture in the way and how do we make modifications so they don't trip and fall and something like that becomes a hazard? So they are doing that part of it to make sure the safety in the home is there and they brought that expertise and we were able to bring clinical expertise from our providers within our system to the program," said O'Connell.

Privacy is always a concern and O'Connell said that the patient will be given information about WeCare at the hospital and then will decide for themselves if they want to participate or not.

The program has the potential to save money for all involved. O'Connell said that there are certain conditions that if a patient is readmitted to the hospital within a 30-day period, insurance will not cover the costs which can impact both the patient and the hospital.

Fishers Fire and Emergency Services personnel are excited about the program.

"It's been fun because we're dealing with something other than an emergency situation," said Chief Davison.

Lt. Joe Harding who is one of five Fire Dept. paramedics involved in the program agrees. "This is fantastic. It's going to be a big change nationwide and to bring

something like this to Fishers and to add an extra service to our residents and to just help people out who are truly in need is just a fantastic notion."

Another paramedic, Lt. Josh Mehling adds "I'm excited about this because of being a reactive service, which we are on the 911 system, this is a proactive way to increase the health of

our community and have a better, healthy life."

All residents of Fishers are eligible to use the free program. For more information, call 595-3200.

#### WeCare Program

"WeCare" opens Fishers firehouses for free blood pressure monitoring. Citizens can stop by any firehouse to have their blood pressure checked and given a card to record and track the information to give to their healthcare provider.

"WeCare" offers citizens a free home safety check to evaluate and make recommendations to help prevent falls, fire, and other accidents, in partnership with CICOA Aging and In-Home Solutions,

"WeCare" is a free, follow-up program for residents of Fishers returning home following discharge from the hospital from serious illness. Partnering with Community Health Network and other area hospitals, a discharge referral program will be available that will help keep patients who have experienced heart attack, heart failure or other critical health issues, from being readmitted to the hospital. With Paramedics following up within 24 to 48 hours of discharge, many factors that cause readmission can be identified and mitigated before they become serious.

"WeCare" working with community resources, will provide vaccinations, to at risk population within Fishers.