

Health Update



United HomeCare going back to roots, adding two counties

By CATHERINE LACKNER

Building upon its success in Miami-Dade County, United HomeCare will expand into Broward and Palm Beach counties this fall, and in 2020 “the expansion will take full bloom,” said Carlos Martinez, president and CEO.

“We will take advantage of our licensure and the infrastructure we’ve spend years developing.” The company celebrated its 45th anniversary in Miami in May.

Its business model is primarily in-home health care and assistance with activities of daily living for people older than 60 or younger people who are disabled, he said.

The elder market is growing dramatically, said Blanca Ceballos, the company’s community relations liaison. People older than 60 represent 26.7% of the US population, a number that’s expected to grow to 32.5% by 2030, she said. In Miami-Dade County, there are 500,000 people older than 60; a United Way of Miami-Dade report said that by 2030, the 60-and-older population will outpace the population of people 17 and younger, she added.



Brick-and-mortar facilities are too expensive, said Carlos Martinez.

United HomeCare took a detour into the assisted living and senior living business a few years ago, building The Residences of United HomeCare in far western Kendall. “For three years, we provided excellent care,” Mr. Martinez said. “However, we’ve noticed that

senior brick-and-mortar facilities are very expensive to build and operate. The most we can serve there is 155 people. We can serve 10 times that number of people for the same cost with home health care, and it allows people to age in place at home, in addition to being more

cost-effective. So our company is redirecting our focus back to home health care.”

There won’t be a need for much office space in Broward and Palm Beach counties, though United HomeCare may lease some shared office space for conducting interviews with potential employees, he said. “We have a very robust tech-driven infrastructure. Aides can use an app on their phones to verify service and scheduling, and do their care plans on site.”

About 90% of the company’s reimbursement for services comes from federal and state programs for low-income elderly and disabled people, he said, which points out the need for home health alternatives for the middle class.

Medicare provides home health care for 60 days after a hospitalization, on a per-case basis, and private long-term care is so expensive as to be prohibitive, Mr. Martinez said. “Medicare Advantage plans can offer home health services, but at the end of the day, they’re still an insurance company, so it’s very rare.”

While Medicaid can pay for some care, it has strict limits on income

and assets. “If you’re middle income, which is most of us, you’re on your own. We see seniors who have done everything right, but they’ve outlived their savings.”

“We do a lot of community education on the topic of resources,” Ms. Ceballos said. “It’s super important.”

“Near and dear to my heart is a program Adele Graham founded, called Community Care for the Elderly, but the funds are limited,” Mr. Martinez said. “We’re of the opinion that the state should tax the hemp industry; Florida is embracing hemp right now.” In addition to CBD, hemp is a good alternative to plastic, in that it’s biodegradable, he said, and it’s approved by the federal governments, eliminating some of the stumbling blocks legal marijuana faces.

“A hemp tax could fund a senior trust fund statewide,” which could be tapped not only for healthcare needs but also for housing, he said. In fact, a hemp tax was written into law in 1933, he added. “We’re in Tallahassee frequently to advocate for more money for the elderly; it’s a difficult situation.”