



## THE MEDICAL HOME FOR ALL – ALL CITIZENS, AGES, AND NEEDS

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What is a medical home? At the Center for Medical Home Improvement (CMHI) we often hear this question. Recently, people seeking access to high quality health care are becoming more familiar with the medical home concept. The medical home was first developed to care for children and youth with special health care needs, it is now seen as a vital part of health care reform for all people. CMHI defines the medical home as a community-based primary care setting which provides and coordinates high quality, planned, patient and family-centered health promotion, acute illness care, and chronic condition management across the lifespan. Care in a medical home is rewarding for clinical teams to provide and satisfying for patients and families to receive.

Health professionals, patients, and families all benefit from a clear understanding of the medical home. In the last few years we have seen a growing number of doctors, nurses, and health professionals working to improve the quality of primary care; many are making a conscious effort to develop a medical home. They are accomplishing this through collaborative partnerships with patients, families, and their communities. While the medical home concept is gaining ground, many people are still unclear about what a medical home really is. To help clarify this, we would like to share one family's experience with you.

First meet Kate Potts, one of three children. Kate and her family recently moved to New Hampshire from Ohio. Kate

is a fifth grader whose favorite hobby is shaping clay into expressive small animals; she has even sold some of her creations at craft fairs. Kate has a number of special health care needs, including both a chronic health condition and a disability. In Ohio the family's doctor had cared for Kate since birth. Not everything was perfect, but her doctor knew the entire family and understood Kate's particular needs. Her parents worried about finding a new doctor – someone knowledgeable about the kinds of special needs affecting Kate – who could partner with them in making sure that their daughter received the best possible care.

Fortunately, the family found Maple Tree Health, a primary care practice and medical home. Prior to her first office visit the clinical team (the primary care physician, nurse practitioner, care coordinator, and office staff) that would be working with Kate and her family had already reviewed Kate's medical records and history. The team welcomed the family and put them at ease. During this first meeting, team members spent time getting to know Kate and her family. They asked Kate about her interests and talked with Kate and her parents about her strengths, needs, and health care goals. The care coordinator documented this information to include in Kate's records. Each team member spoke directly to Kate and she was encouraged to ask questions. They talked with Kate about what she could do to take more responsibility for her daily care. The care coordinator explained that she also would be helping to oversee and coordinate Kate's specialty care with her

medical home. She scheduled a follow-up visit with Kate and her family to provide additional information and to connect them with local resources to meet Kate's needs. The family was especially grateful when the coordinator offered to speak with the teachers and therapists at Kate's new school to explain Kate's health care needs and to answer any questions that they might have.

Maple Tree Health also worked with Kate and her family to build a comprehensive care plan that detailed all summary information, emergency needs, and current actions. The family's experience of care has been one of being truly listened to and included in decisions; it has provided them with a growing sense of safety in their new community. The team calls their practice a "family-centered medical home," the Potts call it, "just what our family needs and values – planned, thoroughly coordinated, and continuously friendly care."

Kate's grandparents live in the same community and also use Maple Tree Health. The practice has been a key resource in helping them stay active and well while they manage aging and chronic health conditions. They are well known to the practice and are on a list to be regularly notified about flu shots and checked for other medical monitoring. When the practice received a note from the pharmacist that they had not filled their recent prescriptions, their care coordinator (a known and trusted figure) gave them a call to find out what was happening. She

learned that they were reducing their medication dosages and doubling up on common meds in order to save money. The care coordinator spoke with them about the critical importance of maintaining appropriate medication levels and helped them find a source for less expensive medications. Her involvement not only saved additional office visits, it most likely prevented an emergency room visit or hospitalization.

As purchasers of health care, patients have the power to expect a high quality medical home. In addition to committing to a healthy lifestyle, individuals can improve their primary care by preparing for visits, setting personal goals, recording results in a journal, asking for and using a written care plan, and working with their medical home team to ensure good communication with other health care providers.

Hopefully, in the not too distant future, we will see an increasing number of primary care practices that are well supported to provide exemplary care within a high quality patient and family-centered medical home. To this end, the Center for Medical Home Improvement is working locally and nationally to help primary care practices and networks to fully develop as high quality medical homes. CMHI also is committed to bringing about the policy changes that are critical to improving primary care. For additional information about the medical home and CMHI services please visit our website at: [www.medicalhomeimprovement.org](http://www.medicalhomeimprovement.org).