

San Francisco Chronicle

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HEALTH & FITNESS



Photos by Liz Hafalia / The Chronicle

Dentist David Blende and assistant Victoria Cameron, above and below, of House Call Dentists do a checkup on a patient in his room.

These dentists make house calls

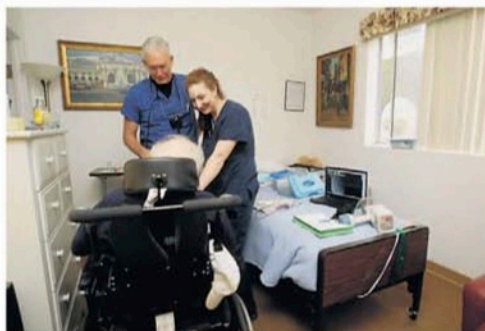
By Judy Richter
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

When Debbie Green's 92-year-old aunt lost a front tooth, she needed a dentist. But Green knew getting her to one wouldn't be easy.

For one thing, Green lives in Aptos (Santa Cruz County), and her aunt, Jean Christian, lives at Sunrise of San Mateo, a continuing care facility for seniors.

So Christian didn't go to the dentist. The dentist went to her. A team from Bay Area House Call Dentists went to her apartment, evaluated her dental health and took X-rays. They discovered that besides a new tooth, she needed root canals and a crown — "a huge reconstruction of her teeth," Green said.

Because she needed so much work, Bay Area House Call Dentists arranged transportation to its office in San Francisco, where all the work was done in about four hours. After a follow-up



visit, "she did fine," Green said. "She liked the people. They kept us informed."

Even better, "She can eat now. She can smile," Green said.

A division of the Blende Dental Group in San Francisco, Bay Area House Call Dentists specializes in working with seniors and people with disabilities or other special needs. The latter can include phobic, obese or immobile people, people

with dementia, the homebound and people who can't control their movements.

A dentist and registered dental assistant will go to a person's home for the initial screening and X-rays with a portable unit. Performed while the person sits in a favorite chair or wheelchair or lies in bed, this process takes about an hour. House calls, available within 50 miles of San Francisco on

Dentists continues on E3

Top signs that a person needs dental care

- ▶▶ Bad breath
- ▶▶ Swollen, red or bleeding gums
- ▶▶ Loose or broken teeth
- ▶▶ Sores or lesions on cheeks, tongue, lips, palate or under dentures
- ▶▶ Dentures that don't fit
- ▶▶ Yeast infection (white spots on the inside of cheeks or on the tongue, tongue may appear coated)
- ▶▶ Hard plaque accumulation
- ▶▶ Pimples in the mouth on the gums or lips
- ▶▶ Person won't open or let anyone touch his mouth

Other possible areas of concern:

- ▶▶ Refusing to eat
- ▶▶ Unintended weight loss
- ▶▶ Chewing seems painful or difficult
- ▶▶ Social isolation
- ▶▶ Putting fingers or hands in the mouth

Source: Bay Area House Call Dentists, www.bahcd.com

TIM GOODMAN
On Television

Want to lose audience? Make series disappear

In a perfect world, some of the executives at ABC would take the blame for allowing arguably the most buzzed-about fall show to lose steam and direction and fade into irrelevance.

"FlashForward" had a killer pilot and tons of promotion. It was a big-budget, cinematic thriller with an intriguing premise: Everybody in the world blacks out at the same time for two minutes and 17 seconds. Most of them have visions about the future — some of those horrific or dangerous — and now there's six months to change the future.



Adam Larkey / ABC

"FlashForward," starring Michael Ealy (left) and John Cho, went missing too long.

That got people talking — and watching. The premiere pulled in 12.4 million viewers, and "FlashForward" appeared to be rocketing toward hitsville. But there was trouble with the show runner and trouble in the direction of the series, which resulted in a lag in viewership. After only 10 episodes, from late September to early December, ABC pulled it off the schedule and said it would be back later. Like, say, March.

That's a long time to go missing, with all kinds of new and popular returning series vying for viewers. On March 18, "FlashForward" returned with a thud: 6.6 million viewers. On Thursday, only 6.2 million showed up — half the premiere's number.

So was it the show, or was it the scheduling? Both, assuredly, but it's never a good idea to yank a show off the air unless you have the home phone number of everybody who watched in the first place. People need

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Tooth docs who make house calls

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weekdays between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., cost \$375. Emergency care is available around the clock. While the group doesn't accept dental insurance, it will file claims for patients who have it.

After the visit, a patient care coordinator reviews the results with the patient or responsible caregiver to recommend treatment, which can be done by House Call Dentists or the person's own dentist. Procedures that can be done at home include cleaning, extracting, and making or repairing dentures. The coordinator also schedules appointments, arranges transportation and facilitates communication between the dentist and the patient or caregiver.

Sleep dentistry

People who need more extensive work, who can't remain still or who are very afraid of dentists can be sedated at the Blende office or treated under general anesthesia at a hospital. With this sleep dentistry, "We try to combine as many appointments as possible," said Amanda White, a nurse and practice manager for

House Call Dentists. The dentists are affiliated with several Bay Area hospitals.

Besides going to private homes, House Call Dentists teams, joined by a patient care coordinator, visit senior facilities, where they offer the initial screening, including X-rays, for a group rate of \$35 per person. Residents may then schedule follow-up services.

Neither the American Dental Association nor the California Dental Association keeps any statistics on dentists who make house calls, since it's a relatively new trend. "It's too soon to tell," said Jennifer George, a spokeswoman for the state association, but "we certainly support that."

Internet searches show a growing number of companies offer similar services for seniors, including HomeCareDentist.com, which also allows appointments to be made online.

AgeSong Laguna Grove and AgeSong Hayes Valley have had semiannual visits from House Call Dentists for about three years. AgeSong offers assisted living, memory care and hospice services.

The dentists "know

how to work with seniors and people with behavior issues," said Maris Corush, community relations director at the AgeSong facilities. "As people get older, they need more dental care."

Elke Tekin, executive director of the AgeSong facilities, said that going to an appointment can be traumatic for people with dementia because changes in routine can upset them.

Regular dental care

But regular dental care is important. White cites a study of nursing home residents conducted by Tohoku University School of Medicine in Japan and published by the American Geriatrics Society, that found "pneumonia ... and death from pneumonia decreased significantly in patients receiving oral care," and that "activities of daily living and cognitive functions showed a tendency to improve (in patients receiving regular oral care.)"

Bacteria from untreated oral infections can get into the bloodstream and invade other organs, possibly resulting in heart disease, respiratory problems or stroke. People who can't eat properly because of pain or missing teeth can become malnourished, also leading to problems.

Proper eating was an issue for Raymond Magpantay's 86-year-old

mother, Juliana Magpantay, who has mobility problems. After her lower dentures were misplaced she had problems eating.

Raymond Magpantay's dentist told him about Bay Area House Call Dentists, who went to his home and treated his mother while she sat in a dining room chair. After four visits, she had her new dentures. Now she's back in her apartment at a senior facility in Daly City.

"They were very compassionate and considerate," her son said. David Blende, who is chief of the division of dentistry at Kaiser's San Francisco hospital and chief of California Pacific Medical Center Hospital's dental division, started Bay Area House Call Dentists in 2004. Making house calls was familiar to him because his father was a physician who made house calls.

"We've been a resource for people who are not good candidates for a traditional dental office setting for physical, emotional or cognitive reasons," Blende said via e-mail. "Then we realized that there was another barrier for ... those who cannot get out of the house for treatment. So we set out to remove that barrier too."

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