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## HealthFlex aims to keep patient care for the elderly at home in the Bay Area

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When Alex and Sofia Koshevatsky were trying to build out their home health care business, it was hard to find partners in the health care industry. They'd go to major hospitals in the Bay Area to form partnerships and offer services to patients, but the staff at the hospitals were often skeptical and hesitant.

But their company, HealthFlex Home Health Services, gradually made inroads at hospitals, with insurance providers and, most crucially, with patients. The key was "going in, meeting with their medical directors, meeting with their case managers," Alex said. "And finding out what were their goals for patient care and how can we help them achieve them." Those values of communication and placing patients first have fueled the company's growth amid a booming industry.

HealthFlex now works with health care giants such as Dignity Health and Kaiser Permanente, along with doctor network Brown and Toland. Those partnerships came with bigger expectations and posed a staffing challenge in an industry rife with high turnover. The company invested early in quality — for both patient care and their employees' well-being — offering robust benefits packages and creating



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HealthFlex Home Health & Hospice co-founders  
Sofia Koshevatsky, left, and Alex Koshevatsky.

a strong, nurturing workplace culture, Alex said. Those steps helped pave the way for the company's growth to over 240 employees with a low turnover rate.

Increasingly, older Americans are turning to companies like HealthFlex to navigate the health care system at home. More than 80 percent of older patients want to avoid hospitalization at the end of their lives, according to a 2016 research paper from the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. With the baby boomer generation aging, the number of people seeking home health care is expected to grow even more rapidly.

As a result, the home health care industry is growing fast; in 2019, roughly \$108.8 billion will be spent on home health care, according to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Office of the Actuary. By 2027, that spending is projected to rise to \$186.8 billion.

As the home health care industry has grown, HealthFlex has expanded right along with it. The Oakland-based company has served over 6,700 patients since it started in 2012, and now serves roughly 800 patients a day all over the Bay Area. The expansion has been fueled, in part, by growing revenues — from \$3.2 million in 2016 to \$10.9 million in 2018.

The company was born during a family meeting. Sofia had just finished nursing school and Alex was in between jobs; meanwhile, Irene Gertsikov, Sofia's mother, who was also a nurse, was running a small nursing agency in San Francisco. They came together to start HealthFlex with the mission to transform the way home health care was delivered.

"Back then, it was very siloed," Alex said. "Hospitals, skilled nursing, rehabs, all post-acute providers would pawn off patients to the next phase."

With offices in Oakland, the Koshevatskys and Gertsikov set about filling gaps in the system by providing personalized services for their elderly patients, with particular attention paid to transitions between hospitals or other facilities and the home. Often, that's where Sofia's nursing instincts kick in: She likes to meet with patients, their family members and their caseworkers to prepare for the transition, she said.

Mary Ann Christopher, who sits on the board of the Community Health Accreditation Partner, said that having nurses in leadership positions is “incredibly important and impactful in terms of the operation of the company, profitability, ability to really drive outcomes that patients and communities are looking for.”

Earlier this year, HealthFlex received accreditation for hospice care — part of its strategy to cover the full continuum of care. Next, the company will seek its palliative care accreditation to offer a bridge for patients from intensive treatment to hospice. HealthFlex also plans to expand into private duty home care, which helps patients with cooking, cleaning and other daily tasks around the house.

“We want to develop our private duty sector so that we can be a one-stop hub,” Alex said. “We want to be able to provide all the services that a patient needs in a home setting.”

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