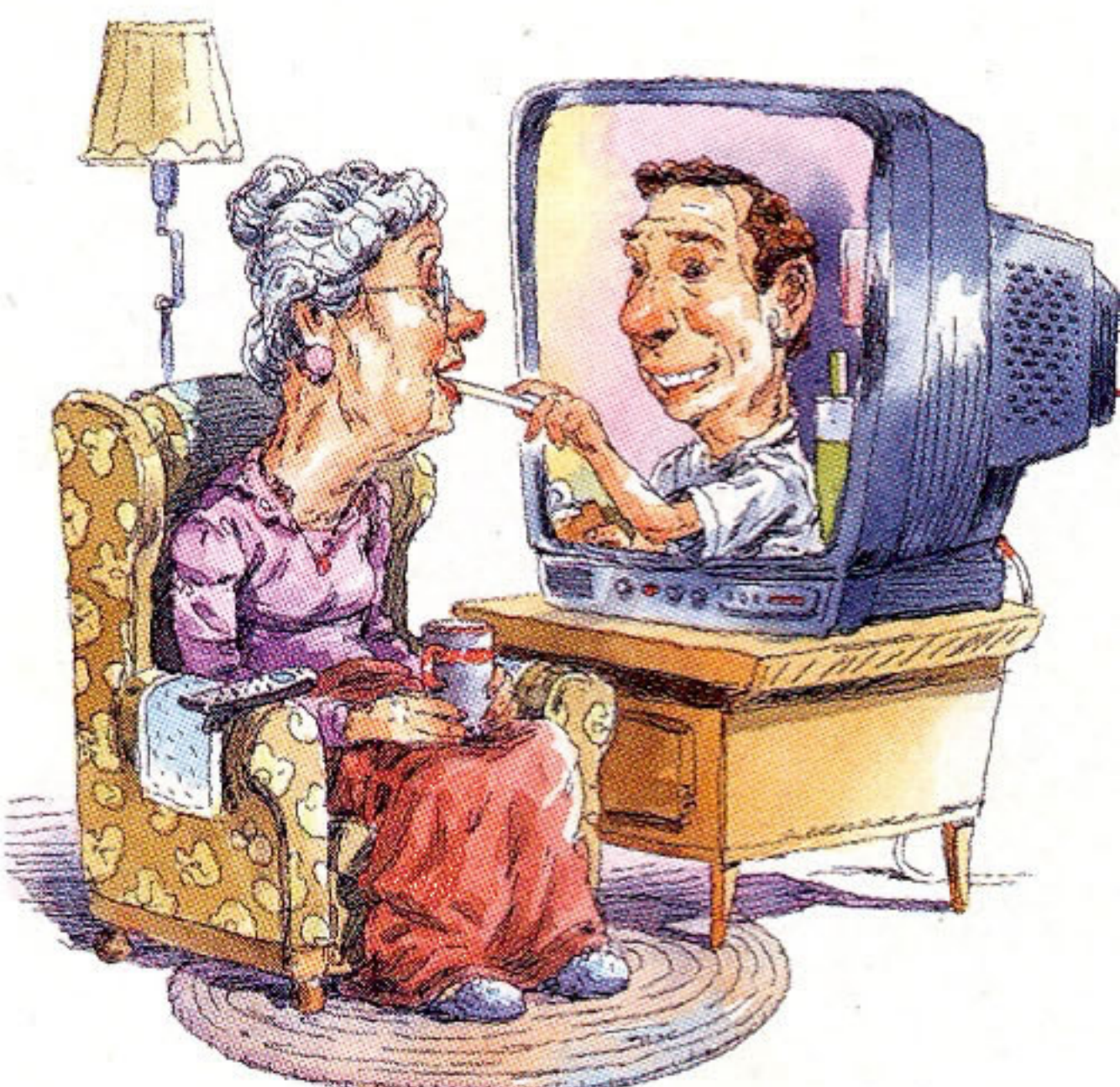


PHONING IT IN

FOR SOME SENIORS, THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE IS NOW ONSCREEN.



Grandma isn't living in the extra bedroom anymore, and you won't find her in the old-folks' home, either. If she's in good shape, she's on her own and would prefer to keep it that way. "Most seniors," says Leslie Hoyt, chief care officer of Dovetail Health, "would rather die than go into a nursing home." Her Needham company employs the latest technology to help the elderly maintain their independence—and help their families rest easier.

Dovetail assigns each patient a nurse, a pharmacist, and a personal assistant. Every day the nurse checks vital health data—weight, blood pressure, blood sugar level—through wireless-enabled devices like scales and blood pressure sleeves that tie into a telemonitoring hub in the patient's home. This month Dovetail begins piloting Motiva, a new program from Philips Electronics that lets nurses use TVs to teleconference and exchange e-mail with patients, as well as show educational videos. Dovetail's plans start at \$500 a month and, according to Hoyt, cut down hospitalizations and emergency room visits. "It's not rocket science," she says, "but it works."

For seniors who have no choice but to enter a nursing home, there's help from a related technology from PhoneDoctoRx. Its videoconferencing system is now being tested at New Bedford Health Care Center, with plans to expand to 15 other facilities this year. "There aren't enough physicians," says PhoneDoctoRx founder Paul Bulat, chief of emergency medicine at St. Luke's Hospital. "And doctors don't have time to go to the facility." Bulat's solution—which consists of a high-definition camera, a video screen, and a high-speed Internet connection—can be rolled into a patient's room and connected to the PhoneDoctoRx center, where eight physicians are always on call. The patient, a nurse, and a doctor then discuss the problem and decide whether a trip to the hospital is required. "Ultimately, this will become the gold standard," Bulat says. "Videoconferencing and telemedicine will emerge as *the* methodology to help us meet the demands of healthcare." —G.L.