

Di Yamei (left) accompanies the elderly woman throughout the duration of her outpatient visit. — Photos by Dong Jun



The elderly woman holds Di's arm as they head out to the hospital.



Di Yamei, from Shanghai Quanchengjiujiu Health Service Co, guides an elderly woman to Xiangshan Hospital for outpatient care.

Peizhen, or accompanying a patient to the hospital, is an emerging new business

Cai Wenjun

Going to the hospital is a tough and exhausting experience for many senior citizens, particularly those who live alone, have limited mobility, or are unfamiliar with smartphone use.

Companies that provide workers to accompany individuals to the hospital and assist patients throughout the process are beginning to profit as demand rises.

This type of service is known as *peizhen*, which translates to “medical treatment accompaniment.”

The market is quite segmented. The elderly, as well as certain enterprise customers, professionals, and young people living alone in the city, make up the majority of the demand.

The latter typically have more stringent requirements, such as health consultation and expert reservation. The hourly rate ranges from 20 yuan (US\$3) to 100 yuan, depending on the service content, requirements

and staff background, with those with medical backgrounds charging more.

“*Peizhen* is a brand-new industry. Our company’s primary market is older individuals, who buy the service for themselves or whose children purchase the service,” said Yu Weisheng, manager of Shanghai Quanchengjiujiu Health Service Co, whose workers can escort three to four old individuals to the hospital every day.

“We also collaborate with some subdistrict administrations in select neighborhoods, which fund the elderly service,” said Yu.

“Typically, elderly people must travel to a nearby hospital for outpatient, rehabilitation therapy, and dialysis services. They engage our workers to assist them because they do not have children or the children are not living with them,” Yu explained.

Di Yamei, a Quanchengjiujiu employee, accompanied a woman in her 70s from Huangpu District to Xiangshan Traditional Chinese Medicine

Hospital. She arrived at the woman’s house at 9am and called a cab to take her to the hospital.

She accompanied her to the specialist, whom the woman typically visits after finishing registration. After the procedure was over, she went to pay the charges, collected the medicine, and sent the woman back home.

“It is standard procedure for an elderly patient to visit a district-level hospital near their home for chronic disease consultation and medication,” said Di, who has worked in the *peizhen* business for almost three years.

“We not only transport the elderly to hospitals, but we also get the prescribed medicine for them.”

“It is not a well-paying job. But I like it because I’ve developed close relationships with these elderly people, who regard me as their child and phone me in my spare time to report their health and share their problems,” she said.

“I feel like I am in demand.” She said her job was

challenging because she has to be alert during the service to ensure the safety of the elderly. At times, she has put in extra effort when the elderly are impatient or in a bad mood.

Yu wants the government to create a series of access qualification, training, and certification programs to improve management and assure the industry’s healthy development.

“It is a new business; there are no rules governing staff qualification, background, pricing, risk management, patients’ medical records, or privacy protection,” he said.

“Service providers should be trained and tested in psychology, medical knowledge, and other necessary skills to ensure service quality and safety,” he stated.

One public hospital is also providing *peizhen* services for free.

Since last year, Shanghai Sixth People’s Hospital, with its trained volunteers, has been collaborating with neighboring communities to provide service for older people living alone.

Elderly folks can call local

neighborhoods or the hospital’s helpline to get services provided by 89 volunteers.

Huashan Hospital’s outpatient department launched a similar program this year.

Peizhen service is also available at high-end hospitals. Jiahui International Hospital has announced one-stop health-care services for the elderly, including outpatient escorting, health examinations, rehabilitation, and one-on-one nursing and psychological care.

Senior patients who come to the hospital alone can also have their test reports sent to their children.

Doctors said they use smart medicine to address chronic diseases and get prescriptions for senior patients.

“International hospitals are also active in disease prevention and control of the elderly, as well as patient care,” said Ge Feng, CEO of Jiahui Health.

“Jiahui has kept the needs of elderly patients in mind. We were declared an ‘elderly-friendly hospital’ by the Shanghai Health Commission last year.”