

“We Make House Calls”

A public health story from...

Christian County Public Health Department



When elderly Mrs. Greene* tested positive for tuberculosis (TB), the Christian County Health Department went above and beyond the call of duty to treat her. Public Health Nurse Shelby Sears learned the 83-year-old lived alone, did not drive,

and that her family could not bring her in; so, she made house calls to treat Mrs. Greene that ended up lasting a year. Normally, the 112 people the department tests or treats for TB, hypertension, HIV, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) each month drive in, or a relative brings them.

Sears arrived at Mrs. Greene's home every day for the first two weeks after diagnosis, and twice weekly after that, armed with medication to stop the spread of the disease. TB usually attacks a person's lungs and is spread through the air from one person to another. It is considered the world's leading health threat, after HIV.

"I tried to reassure her," says Sears. "I told her she would have to take around six pills a day, probably for a year, and hold off on going to lunch or church for awhile. Like most people, she had a really hard time with that. So I gave her a shoulder to cry on."

Soon, however, Mrs. Greene developed bad side effects to the medication: fever and severe muscle and joint aches. "She

couldn't get out of bed," says Sears. "That's not a normal reaction. Her family began calling, wondering if they should be concerned, saying they were having a hard time getting through to her doctor."

Nurse Sears transformed into Advocate Sears. "I called her doctor, explaining that Mrs. Greene needed to be seen and asking for her medications to be changed. I did that whenever she had an adverse reaction, which was often. Lots of times, a doctor will receive the message more quickly if a nurse calls rather than a family member."

Today, Mrs. Greene is healthy and TB-free, and so is her family, who, miraculously never caught the highly infectious disease. "We exchange Christmas cards every year," Sears says, smiling from ear to ear.

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** (The case described is real, but the names have been changed).*

