

HEALTH CARE

Cost stands between residents and medical equipment



Jim Mahoney/Staff Photographer

To save painful steps, Maria Martin tosses wet laundry from the washer to the dryer. Martin, disabled by a knee injury, needs a motorized wheelchair but can't afford the \$6,000 insurance deductible. She said a medical equipment exchange program would change her life.

Giving more than a hand

Exchange would match used walkers, wheelchairs with those who need them

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Thousands of Dallas-area residents need wheelchairs, hospital beds and walkers but cannot afford them.

And many others have used medical equipment collecting dust in their closets.

That's where Dallas Area Interfaith, a nonprofit group made up of area churches and synagogues,

comes in. The group is starting a new program, DME (Durable Medical Equipment) Exchange of Dallas, to get used items to those in need.

The group estimates there are at least 25,000 people in Dallas County who need a variety of medical equipment.

The organization has applied to create a nonprofit entity to do the work, which will focus on Dallas County at first. Money is being raised to hire a handful of employees and locate the warehouse space needed.

The biggest challenge to getting the equipment to people is meeting the state sanitization guidelines. The standards are designed to minimize

the threat of spreading infection.

"When it comes time to discharge patients from the hospital, we're scrambling to find equipment," said Dr. Stan Pomarantz, chief utilization officer for Parkland Health & Hospital System.

Pomarantz — one of the volunteers at Temple Emanu-El, which has taken the lead on the project — said Parkland has a great need for the help.

The exchange will be modeled after a program called Project Mend in San Antonio. The goal is to help people leave the hospital and return to

AT A GLANCE DME Exchange

DME Exchange of Dallas organizers are raising money to start a nonprofit medical salvage organization. Dallas Area Interfaith, a group of local congregations, created the project after hearing about the need for affordable equipment.

To contact the group, call 214-242-1928 or go to www.dfwdmeexchange.org.

A video about the project can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofiq8EssajM.

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Medical equipment to be recycled

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work more quickly — and to keep used medical equipment out of landfills.

"We're excited about the possibilities," said Willie Bennett, Dallas Area Interfaith's lead organizer.

Dallas' Gold Metal Recyclers has collected more than 100 wheelchairs and walkers in the past two months, setting them aside for the exchange.

Organizers said they saw the need during a recent series of community meetings on health care.

"We kept hearing over and over again about how people could not afford durable medical equipment," Rabbi Asher Knight of Temple Emanu-El said. Some had no insurance. Others had insurance that would not pay for the equip-



Jim Mahoney/Staff Photographer

Maria Martin balances on a cane and vacuum while trying to clean her house in West Dallas.

ment or high deductibles that made things unaffordable.

The exchange will charge a small fee, but nobody will be turned away, Knight said.

Samanda Gronstal, associate organizer for Dallas Area Interfaith, said she has met many people in need.

There was a teacher with

polio who could no longer afford the equipment after retiring. Another case involved a man in his 30s disabled by multiple sclerosis.

Maria Martin, who became disabled and lost her job after a knee injury, experiences pain and has difficulty walking. She also has a \$6,000 deductible on her insurance, so she can't afford a motorized wheelchair.

She's lucky to have a 16-year-old daughter to help get her around, but the 54-year-old West Dallas woman said the medical equipment exchange would be a life changer for her and many others. Martin would no longer have to rely on others for trips to the doctor's office or grocery store.

"I'm sure there are people who don't have anybody to take them," she said. "This would really help them."