Comprehensive, Compassionate Care

Helping Seniors Transition to a More Fulfilled Life

What's in a name? When it comes to the Center for Geropsychiatry at Eisenhower Medical Center, this clinical moniker doesn't do justice to the compassionate and supportive care this unique program offers seniors who are struggling with anxiety, depression or other behavioral problems.

Now a year old, this program — the only one of its kind in the desert — is a comprehensive and compassionate inpatient center that provides an extraordinary level of personalized care and support exclusively for people aged 65 and older who need help returning to a healthier mental and physical state. The 12-bed unit, all private rooms, provides a safe and confidential setting in which patients are carefully evaluated and take part in a range of daily therapeutic activities designed to help them resolve the issues that prevent them from living a happy, healthy lifestyle. The average length of stay at the Center is six to 10 days, and it is covered by most major health plans including Medicare, HMOs, private health insurance plans and private pay.

"The buzzword for our approach is biopsychosocial," says Anthony Bassanelli, MD, Medical Director, Eisenhower Center for Geropsychiatry. "It means we look at the whole person, and we have an entire team of experts who are focused on each individual's unique situation and needs."

These experts include a psychiatrist, registered nurse, social worker and recreational therapist who meet with the patient as a team every day. Family members, significant others or care providers are frequently invited to attend these daily review sessions.

"This level of attentiveness is unique," Dr. Bassanelli notes. "Other treatment programs generally only review patients' progress weekly. We're very much aware of what's going on with each patient. We feel it's imperative because these patients often have a complicated medical history and their condition can change quickly. We definitely look at medical problems along with mental health issues. We conduct a complete physical exam and facilitate access to any specialty care that may be needed."

During their stay, patients are also seen by their own primary care physician or an internist who specializes in geriatric medicine.

Each patient is also given a comprehensive screening test called the Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MoCA©) upon admission.
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—Dr. Bassanelli

"It's a tool that gives us a handle on any problems a patient might be having with concentration, attention, memory and language, for example," explains Dr. Bassanelli. "It lets us know if someone is capable of living independently, managing medications and being in charge of their own finances."

"Families look to us for answers about what's happening with their spouse, significant other or parent," he adds. "With this objective test, we can quantify and understand what we're dealing with and formulate an appropriate treatment plan."

"During their stay, patients participate in a daily program of therapeutic group activities, designed to enhance health, positive coping skills, independence and quality of life. Dining is family-style to encourage socialization and to decrease isolation," notes Maura Fisher, Director, Eisenhower Center for Geropsychiatry.

"There is still a stigma about psychiatry, particularly among seniors," Dr. Bassanelli acknowledges. "But what we are offering is a supportive network of resources to help seniors feel less alone and to learn new ways of doing things to help them feel more fulfilled and connected."

This supportive network doesn't end when the patient leaves the Center.

"We develop a comprehensive aftercare plan, working closely with the patient and family to identify what the patient is capable of doing at home, if they can safely return there and offer additional support such as home health care or community resources." Fisher says. "Our discharge plan includes medical as well as mental health follow-up, along with any necessary physical or occupational therapy and specialty care."

"Notably, our program is completely voluntary, and a physician referral is not required. In other words, seniors can admit themselves to this program," explains Judy Kaye-Cressman, who handles the Center's community relations. "Family members or even concerned administrators of senior housing or assisted-living facilities may also refer someone they believe would benefit from the Center's services. All it takes to get started is a phone call."

Each call receives an immediate response.

"We can conduct a phone intake [assessment] and have a patient admitted to our Center within two hours," Fisher notes.

"This program is different from anything else out there, and it's making a positive impact in seniors' lives," Dr. Bassanelli adds. "They deserve quality health care, and Eisenhower is here to help make that happen."

For more information about the Eisenhower Center for Geropsychiatry, call 760-837-8767, 24 hours a day.

Complex Aging Issues

"The so-called golden years are often difficult for many people in their 80s or 90s who are living alone, whose families are far away, and whose spouse and close friends are deceased," explains Dr. Bassanelli. "They're often socially isolated, their nutrition is frequently poor, and there's likely been some decline in their memory and thinking."

"It's not uncommon for seniors to feel lonely and depressed. Who wouldn't be in this situation?" he continues. "And when you factor in the health issues that come with aging, life can be very hard for many older adults."

Other common scenarios include seniors with a history of depression or bipolar disorder whose condition has worsened with age or perhaps whose medications are no longer effective. Or someone who isn't feeling or acting "right" — the individual may be anxious, or family members are concerned that they're depressed or perhaps experiencing the early stages of dementia.

For many, aging often presents a range of complex issues. To learn more about Eisenhower's Center for Geropsychiatry for help in dealing with these issues and more, call 760-837-8767, 24 hours a day.

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