

CENTRAL NEW YORK

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New Program Brings
Collective Resources
to the Table to

Enhance Wellness for Older Adults

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THE RODNEY AND MARJORIE FINK INSTITUTE AT MENORAH PARK FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON AGING (IMPARA) IS A NEW LOCAL RESEARCH ORGANIZATION THAT STRIVES TO ENHANCE WELLNESS FOR OLDER ADULTS BY NETWORKING PROFESSIONAL, ALLIED HEALTH, PARAPROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC RESOURCES TO DEVELOP AND APPLY NEW BEST PRACTICES AND MODELS OF SERVICE DELIVERY. WITH AN EMPHASIS ON BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES, ITS MISSION IS “TO PROMOTE THE STUDY OF AGING, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES, AND HEALTH AND SPIRITUAL CARE PROVIDERS IN OUR REGION.”

OLDER ADULTS GENERALLY have an array of chronic, comorbid health conditions that makes management of their care more complex. Specialized providers and teams are key to simultaneous management of multiple diseases and conditions. Because of the critical shortage of geriatricians, geriatric mental health providers and allied health professionals and nursing staff who specialize in meeting the needs of older adults, many older adults are unable to access these specialized provider teams and, thus, achieve optimum outcomes.

“Because of the particularity and complexity of each older person’s needs, a multidisciplinary team approach to care is necessary,” says Judith Huober, Director of IMPARA. “Physical and cognitive decline, along with factors including depression and anxiety, increase older adults’ dependence on outside support and challenge providers and informal caregivers to find feasible ways of addressing a wide range of concerns — from maximizing functional status, to ensuring safe housing and finding transportation to maintaining or creating the meaningful connections that make life worth living into old age.”

IMPARA seeks to address these challenges by facilitating collaborations between itself and other agencies, and creating the infrastructure necessary to support teams researching new methods and train upcoming members of the workforce.

“The basic approach of IMPARA is not necessarily to create new resources, but to link existing organizations, practitioners and researchers together to involve them all in research for the



IMPARA’s clinical research committee meeting (L-R): Dr. Maria Brown, IMPARA’s Research Coordinator; Christy Bond, Director of Aging and Complex Care at Crouse Hospital; Judith Huober, IMPARA’s Director; Roslyn Bilford, former Onondaga County commissioner of aging; and Luanna Reeves, Director of Education, Library and Media Services at Crouse Hospital and family council liaison at Menorah Park

betterment of the older adult population here in Syracuse and beyond,” says Huober. “Through our partnership with several colleges and training programs, we have also been able to engage students of a variety of levels in our research, which allows us to attract the next generation of practitioners to work with the geriatric population and at the same time teach them new methods as they are being developed.”

A Local Focus

Menorah Park — located in Syracuse — provides independent and assisted living, skilled nursing care, short-term rehabilitation and daycare services for older adults. It is also the home of IMPARA, allowing residents at Menorah Park to be the first to benefit from new developments in geriatric care.

“Through IMPARA, we will be doing advanced research and will be collaborating with other experts and organizations in the field of aging,” says Huober. “Menorah Park is essentially the laboratory where new methods and best practices will be developed and taught, and in many cases, our residents will be first in line to take advantage of these innovations.”

Current Projects in Development

IMPARA received its 501(c)(3) status in February 2010 and has since been working to develop its first research studies and projects. The institute brought Menorah Park, InterFaith Works of Central New York, New York State Osteoporosis Prevention and

Education Program, State University of New York Upstate Medical University and St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center into the coalition led by the Onondaga County Department of Aging and Youth to "Step Up to Stop Falls," funded through the Community Health Foundation of Western and Central New York and due to kick off in November. Several other studies, still in the proposal stages, also seek to enhance the knowledge base and foster positive change in delivery of geriatric care, including Project "To Life!" which addresses the mental health challenges of geriatric patients through telemedicine and specialized residential support; Health Literacy of Informal Caregivers: Improving Geriatric Patient Outcomes, which is aimed at training care providers to communicate more effectively with the informal caregivers of geriatric patients; and a study on empathic communication in the long-term care setting, which seeks to develop, implement, evaluate and promulgate a model program to support staff and the families and informal caregivers of the residents.

Addressing Mental Health Concerns

Older adults with mental health conditions are an often underserved population. As a patient ages and physical ailments become more prevalent, the focus of care tends to shift to eliminate access to mental health services that were previously available.

"Aging patients who were previously receiving care in the mental health system now typically receive their health care under the aegis of the aging services system, which is not well-equipped to address their mental health needs," says Huober, "and in a vicious cycle, because of the behaviors arising from the now poorly addressed mental health issues, senior facilities are hard pressed to manage the residents' physical needs. As a result, patients with mental illness are often institutionalized in nursing homes even though they do not have the physical ailments necessitating such restrictive care — or they cycle in and out of acute care settings."

To combat this rising problem, IMPARA developed Project "To Life!" in partnership with the department of psychiatry at the State University of New York Upstate Medical University. Proposing to deliver services to patients via telemedicine, this program would allow patients to stay in their own homes or a specialized assisted living setting at Menorah Park while receiving daily care for their mental health conditions and other psychosocial support.

"Elderly patients are more prone to depression, anxiety and dementia, which can present in addition to other problems, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or substance abuse. Many primary care providers do not consider these when treating older adults," says Mantosh Dewan, M.D., distinguished service professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at State University of New York Upstate Medical University. "What we are hoping to do through this program is provide a continuum of care for patients while allowing them to remain in the least-restrictive environment possible through telepsychiatry."

Telepsychiatry provides an inexpensive option for communicating with and providing services to patients who may have trouble traveling to and from multiple physician appointments. By using telepsychiatry to address issues such as depression or anxiety, as

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well as deliver fitness, social and other wellness-directed interventions, project leaders expect to see a decrease in the number of older adults who visit the emergency department or who are hospitalized.

"Older adults are prone to depression, which prevents them from taking care of themselves as well as they should," says Dr. Dewan. "For example, if you have a patient with heart disease and depression, the depression may cause the patient to quit taking medications as prescribed. If the medication is not taken correctly, the patient will experience heart disease-related complications, which could necessitate a costly emergency department visit."

Through the residential and telepsychiatry program, nurses check in with patients every morning to ensure they are taking their medications appropriately. Instructors also offer fitness and other enrichment experiences. With multiple patients seen at each check in, the system is efficient. Because patients are able to talk

Mantosh Dewan, M.D., Chair and distinguished service professor of Psychiatry at State University of New York Upstate Medical University





IMPARA's activities will bring expert researchers and clinicians to the Menorah Park campus, making the latest methods of care available to residents and giving staff and students from outside programs the opportunity for advanced training.

PROVIDING ADVANCED KNOWLEDGE FOR FUTURE PROVIDERS

RODNEY AND MARJORIE Fink Institute at Menorah Park for Applied Research on Aging (IMPARA) also partners with local colleges and health care training programs; for example, working with Le Moyne College's Department of Nursing to allow graduate nursing students the opportunity to participate in research projects that are being conducted through IMPARA. IMPARA has also begun talks with Mantosh Dewan, M.D., distinguished service professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at State University of New York Upstate Medical University, to help develop a geriatric psychiatry fellowship at Upstate Medical University. The proposed model would feature a joint appointment for a fellowship director and a medical director for IMPARA who would both teach and conduct research.

Involving students in research and exposing them to geriatric aspects of their chosen field during their training has a few objectives. One is to dispel some of the negative stereotypes of working with older adults and attract more caregivers into geriatric specialties. Another is the expectation that a cadre of IMPARA-influenced students across the gamut of health care disciplines will apply the knowledge they gain to their daily practice, whatever focus their careers take.

"Our partnership with IMPARA is wonderful for everyone involved," says Susan Bastable, Ed.D., R.N., professor and Chair of the Department of Nursing at Le Moyne College. "Not only do these students get exposure to research being conducted in the field, but that research is then brought back into the classroom and provides us with knowledge about how to best address education and care in the older adult population."

with one another as well during this time, a virtual community is formed among the program participants, whether in the residential or the community-based setting.

"We are hoping that patients will look forward to this daily interaction," says Dr. Dewan. "By providing a support group of peers who are experiencing the same challenges, it is hoped that their depression will ease as well."

Reaching Out to Informal Caregivers

The Health Literacy of Informal Caregivers: Improving Geriatric Patient Outcomes study, which is being conducted through a partnership with Le Moyne College and State University of New York Upstate Medical University, seeks to put together two current "hot" areas in care management: the issue of health literacy, or the ability to understand and act on the basis of health information, and the key role of informal caregivers — spouses, children and neighbors — who deliver more than 80% of all long-term care provided to older adults.

"Health literacy is a large problem in the United States," says Susan Bastable, Ed.D., R.N., professor and Chair of the Department of Nursing at Le Moyne College. "Many times, health professionals expect that patients understand what is being communicated to them, and patients do not want to appear ignorant so they don't ask additional questions. However, of the information that is being presented, only a small percentage is actually understood correctly."

Caregivers of older adults, although key to treatment adherence, are often left out when it comes to communicating important information regarding a patient's disease and disease management, and their health literacy is usually not considered even when they are kept "in the loop." By ensuring that caregivers truly understand what is required to manage a patient's condition, the team believes older adults will achieve better outcomes.

"Health care professionals often speak with patients, but many times, we are not clear with the caregivers — and they are the people who go home with the patient and manage their care on a daily basis," says Dr. Bastable. "If they do not understand what the person should be eating or when medication should be taken, we have missed a key individual in that patient's support system. Our study will research whether providers are effectively educating their patients' caregivers and, if not, how to improve."



Katherine Stone, a resident of the Jewish Health and Rehabilitation Center at Menorah Park, and Lady Guinevere, a visitor with Pet Partners of Syracuse, Inc.

For more information about IMPARA and services available at Menorah Park, visit www.menorahparkny.com.