

Together we can

Specialized Geriatrics Program

More than 80% of Canadians over age 65 have a chronic disease; 70% of those suffer from two or more diseases. Seniors with complex and often multiple health issues including diabetes, dementia, heart disease, pneumonia and depression are the focus of Specialized Geriatric Services (SGS) at Providence Care's St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital.

Providence Care provides specialized geriatric services to older people with complex health care needs. Services are offered through the Southeastern Regional Geriatric Program — one of just five regional geriatric programs in Ontario — and in collaboration with the Division of Geriatric Medicine at Queen's University. The services include a 16-bed inpatient unit at St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital for patients with complex health needs, who require comprehensive assessment, treatment and rehabilitation. Creating a healthy and safe environment where seniors can age at home or function as independently as possible wherever they live is a driving priority of St. Mary's specialized geriatric team.

The Program's specialized clinics, Day Hospital and outreach services provide more than 4,000 visits a year to



seniors, many over age 75, who remain at home while receiving care from registered nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and other health care professionals.

Redevelopment

Redevelopment will see the consolidation of Providence Care's St. Mary's of the Lake Hospital and Mental Health Services programs in a new building on the King Street site. This new facility will provide patients with a more modern, fully accessible, therapeutic environment designed to enhance patient comfort and support rehabilitation and recovery.

The current facilities are not

appropriate for the needs of today's patients and clients, many of whom are living with complex physical health issues or recovering from a stroke or spinal cord injury. The original buildings at St. Mary's of the Lake date back to the turn of the century, and don't easily accommodate today's wheelchairs and other mobility aids.

Providence Care's sprawling Mental Health Services site on King Street West was built in the 1950s. Its ward-style rooms spread across kilometres of stark concrete corridors are both inefficient to operate and unsuited to modern approaches to mental health care and recovery.

Our plan is to consolidate the programs from both sites in



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a brand new hospital on the King West site. New, efficient rehabilitation space for inpatients and outpatients will mean more people can benefit from post-surgical/accident or injury rehabilitation. Inpatient units will be grouped in neighbourhoods of smaller family-type clusters of eight to 10 beds with access to views of the surrounding landscape and to common areas.

Equipment

Each of the programs within the Specialized Geriatric Services has unique equipment needs, aimed at optimizing patients' health, functional independence and quality of life. Within the Day Hospital's Daily Living Kitchen, for example, assistive devices like automatic dials, and adjustable countertops and kitchen cabinets help patients regain function and the confidence to live independently.

Ongoing investments are required to help upgrade the Program's assessment and rehabilitation tools:

- A \$2,500 arm ergometer can help geriatric clients improve heart and lung function, while strengthening muscles.
- Heavy-duty wheelchairs (~\$2,500 each) help to foster independence and reduce injury among patients with pronounced weight gain and mobility problems.
- Floor transfer poles assist elderly clients with balance problems by providing the means for safe and

independent transfer without the need for a mechanical lift. As many as 10 of the \$325 units could help to reduce risk of injury for patients and staff.

Education

Specialized Geriatric Services is actively involved in the education of health care providers, communities and the general public. Among SGS staff, registered nurses participate regularly in workshops and conferences on standards of care and emerging strategies for the management of complex issues like dementia, agitation and skin ulcer care.

While continuing education is a priority for all staff and a measurable benefit to specialized geriatric patients, it is an ongoing challenge to ensure participation never comes at the expense of day-to-day patient care. A fund to provide relief time for nursing education, for example, will enable SGS to retain on-call nursing staff to care for patients when full-time team members are attending educational opportunities.

Research

Specialized Geriatric Services houses an active research program with existing and emerging strengths in health care service evaluation; educational design and delivery; Alzheimer's disease and related disorders; and clinical studies.

Drawing on evidence-based models of care, for example, Kingston's geriatric health care specialists recently pioneered an elder-friendly audit tool used to assess SGS's inpatient care environment on measures of safety, comfort and compatibility with delivery strategies. The tool identified an urgent need for practical changes involving furniture placement, bed height and lighting. It also led to the purchase of new inpatient room chairs and storage units.

A second pivotal study on end-of-life communication has resulted in the development of an innovative decision aid for physicians. The aid, which includes guidelines for discussing health care with older patients, is now being tested within the Southeastern Regional Geriatric Program. In time, it may become the standard of care for geriatric physicians province-wide and beyond.

Opportunities for giving

- Unrestricted gifts to help the program, *no minimum*
- Patient care equipment (list available), \$1,000 - \$175,000
- Send a nurse to a conference or training session, \$500 - \$3,000
- Support on-site training session for clinical staff, \$2,000 - \$5,000
- Invest in local hospital research, *no minimum*