

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders



## NICHE SOLUTION #10 • 2010

### THE SENIORS EMERGENCY CENTER

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**PROBLEM:** Serving the emergency care needs of a growing diverse older adult population.

**SOLUTION:** Creation of the Seniors Emergency Center (SEC), the first of its kind in the nation.

**Problem Identified** Only infants go to the emergency department at a higher rate than people 75-and-older, according to a recent federal government survey. The rate of emergency room visits by the older adult grew 34% during the decade 1993 to 2003, faster than any other group (McCaig & Nawar, 2006). If this trend continues, visits by older adults could nearly double by 2013 to 11.7 million, up from 6.4 million in 2003. This trend presents a tremendous challenge to health systems in meeting the complex, uncertain needs of non-acute older adult patients and those who care for them.



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Pictured above: Seniors Emergency Center, Holy Cross Hospital

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**Solution Formulated** Holy Cross Hospital (HCH) created the Seniors Emergency Center (SEC), the first of its kind in the nation. This innovative, 8-bed, dedicated unit is designed to serve the needs of a diverse older adult population. A Senior Care Team at the SEC, consisting of a physician, nurse, geriatric nurse practitioner and geriatric social worker, provides emergency care to older adults and promotes a continuum of care that starts in the hospital and continues into the community.

The discharge process begins when the patient is still in the SEC. One day after discharge, the social worker checks to ensure the patient has filled prescriptions and made appointments with their primary medical doctor. All patients who are known to be on five or more medications have a polypharmacy review completed.

The physical environment of the SEC was created to target the needs of older adults. Sensory changes are addressed by incorporating warm colors; cognitive impairments are managed by utilizing clock and calendar to provide frequent orientation; safety modifications include non-skid flooring; and comfort measures are integrated with the use of pressure reducing mattresses and warm blankets. Another innovation, the geriatric-focused, evidence-based Triage Risk Screening Tool (TRST) was implemented to improve clinical outcomes by transitioning senior patients to home with community resources.

**NICHE Support** Critical to improving care delivery is a comprehensive training program to improve the geriatric competence of staff. Additionally, the Geriatric Resource Nurse model can provide unit-based experts.

**Evaluation/Results** Since opening in November 2008, over 19,000 patients over age 65 were seen in the SEC. The 30-day revisit rate dropped from a high of 16.5% to 11.8%. 30-day revisit rate with hospitalization went from 10.9% to 5.2%. Patient satisfaction survey results showed that over 95% of patients would recommend the HCH Seniors Emergency Center to family and friends.

- For more information**
1. McCaig L.F., Nawar E.W. (2006) National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey: 2004 emergency department summary. *Adv Data* 372:1-32.
  2. Schumacher J.G. (2005) Emergency medicine and older adults: continuing challenges and opportunities. *Am J Emerg Med* 23:556-560.
  3. Salvi F., Morichi V., Grilli A., Giorgi R., De Tommaso G., Dessi-Fulgheri P. (2007) The elderly in the emergency department: a critical review of problems and solutions. *Intern Emerg Med* 2:292-301.
  4. Mion, L. et al. (2001) Establishing a case-finding and referral system for at-risk older individuals in the emergency department setting: The SIGNET model. 1379-1386.

- NICHE-related resources**
1. Calkins, Margaret, Optimizing the Hospital Environment for Older Adults, recorded webinar. (Available at NICHE Knowledge Center, accessed via [www.nicheprogram.org/join-webinars](http://www.nicheprogram.org/join-webinars)).
  2. Capezuti, E., Zwicker, D., Mezey, M., & Fulmer, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Evidence-based geriatric nursing protocols for best practice*, 3rd ed. Springer Publishing Company: New York.
  3. Geriatric Resource Training – NICHE Geriatric Resource Nurse Core Curriculum. (Available at NICHE Knowledge Center, accessed via [www.nicheprogram.org](http://www.nicheprogram.org)).

### About NICHE

NICHE is a national organization designed to help health care professionals in hospitals improve the care of older adults. NICHE hospitals seek to create an environment where older adult patients receive care that results in better outcomes. This climate of success encourages patients and their families to seek NICHE designated hospitals for their medical needs. The NICHE Network now numbers nearly 300 hospitals throughout North America.

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