

Help for Elder Family Members



To address the health concerns of an aging population, Atlantic Health System has developed a comprehensive suite of services designed to meet the unique needs of the elderly and their family members. Services include medical professionals trained in geriatrics in the emergency department and inpatient units, as well as outpatient primary care providers and a hotline to provide resource recommendations. Specialists in geriatrics “are trained to look across the entire spectrum, because every 95-year-old is not like every 95-year-old,” says Keerti Sharma, MD, medical director of the Geriatric Assessment Center at Atlantic Health System.

GERIATRIC-FRIENDLY EMERGENCY CARE

Emergency Department geriatric coordinator Susan Boyle, APN, says the most common reason for emergency department visits by the elderly is falls. To accommodate the physical needs of older patients, the emergency department at Morristown Medical Center has specialized lighting that cuts down on the glare, nonslip flooring, and pressure relieving mattresses,” says Boyle. “Every patient room has a toilet and sink so no one has to walk a long distance, and we have grab bars for safety.” Newton and Hackettstown medical centers also provide geriatric-friendly features.

In the primary care setting, patients undergo a geriatric assessment that includes an evaluation of cognition, functional ability, nutrition and social systems. Medically, Dr. Sharma says, “The most worrisome thing that you see in a geriatric patient is that they are often seeing multiple providers with no coordination of care, or are on medications that may have interactions.”

GERIATRIC ASSESSMENT CENTER

For older patients who are especially frail or have multiple medical problems, a provider who specializes in geriatric care can be a helpful alternative. An initial visit to the Geriatric Assessment Center, part of the David and Joan Powell Center for Healthy Aging, includes a full medical history and health evaluation by a geriatric specialist who better understand the patient’s individual needs.

The Center’s team of experts, including nurse practitioners, certified medical assistants and clinical social workers, can then use a multidisciplinary approach to explore the medical, functional and psychosocial challenges faced by seniors and focus on those with ongoing medical needs.



RESOURCES AVAILABLE

In addition to providing care focused on the elderly patient, Atlantic Health System offers the Healthy Aging Program. This phone- and email-based hotline, available Monday through Friday, offers tips on home health services, skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, adult day services, transportation and other services for older adults. Healthy Aging coordinator Rebecca Abenante says: “I often get calls from family members who say, ‘I’m noticing changes in my mom, and I really don’t know what to do.’ I find out what they are observing and can offer ways to approach the situation or resources that might be helpful.”

For further information about the Geriatric Assessment Center, call 973-971-7022. Contact the Healthy Aging Hotline at 973-971-5839 or healthyaging@atlantichealth.org.

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Dr. Sharma is part of Atlantic Medical Group, a multispecialty network of health care providers. For more information, visit atlanticmedicalgroupnj.org.