

Health Policy Newsletter

Volume 9, Number 2

May, 1996

Article 4

The Unique Wills-Jefferson Geriatric Psychiatry Program

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Suggested Citation:

Glick, JA. The unique Wills-Jefferson geriatric psychiatry program. Health Policy Newsletter 1996; 9(2): Article 4. Retrieved [date] from <http://jdc.jefferson.edu/hpn/vol9/iss2/4>.

The Unique Wills-Jefferson Geriatric Psychiatry Program

With their long-standing institutional commitment to geriatrics, and their recognition of the need for a unified medical/psychiatric/neurological approach to improving the functioning of elderly people, Wills Eye Hospital launched the cooperative Wills-Jefferson Geriatric Psychiatry Program at Wills in the Spring of 1991. This Program is now a full-fledged academic medical entity, providing inpatient and outpatient clinical services, outreach activities, and organized research and educational programs.

The Program is staffed by four full-time geriatric psychiatrists, all of whom hold Jefferson faculty appointments. Chief of the unit is Barry W. Rovner, MD, (Jefferson '80), who is the Department of Psychiatry's Director of Geriatric Psychiatry. While Jefferson physicians in the Departments of Family Medicine, Medicine, and Neurology are also active Program participants, the nurses, social workers, and other staff members are Wills employees.

Inpatient services are conducted in a 26 bed acute care unit housed on the 8th floor of Wills Eye Hospital, which is segmented for dementia cases and for major affective disorders (depression and comorbidity problems). Since opening, the unit has had 1,108 admissions, with the largest numbers divided almost equally among dementia and affective disorders cases. A smaller number of patients suffered from other mental disorders. Average patient age is 77 years, and average length of stay is 23.9 days. Patient comorbidities include cardiac (79.4%), musculoskeletal (39.3%), endocrine (18.9%) and neurologic (18.0%) conditions.

Outpatient services are conducted as a collaborative geriatric assessment clinic, and include Family Medicine, Internal Medicine and Psychiatry physicians functioning as a single unit. Patients recommended for admission from the clinic are triaged to the appropriate service. Other services include occupational, physical, and activities therapy. An active social work program is conducted, and support programs for patients' families are held on a regular schedule.

Each of the Program's geriatric psychiatrists engages in research. Dr. Rovner's interests are in depression and disability in age-related vision loss, and the nursing home care of dementia patients. In addition, he and Edward Kim, MD, (Jefferson '88) are cooperating on a geriatric depression outcomes study, following over time depression patients admitted to the Program to identify predictors of successful outcomes. Rodney Pelchat, MD, is a national surveyor in a major study of the quality of care in nursing homes, while Mark Zisselman, MD, has been studying the negative impacts of a class of widely prescribed drugs, benzodiazepines, on the elderly collaboratively with Daniel Louis and Elaine Yuen of the Center for Research in Medical Education and Health Care. The Wills nursing staff, headed by Terri Schmitter, MSN, RN, CS, has published a series of four articles in *The Journal of Gerontological Nursing* describing the processes of care in the Program.

The Program also has been sponsoring a series of continuing medical education activities. The most recent program, *Depression in Primary Care*, was held in November, 1995, sponsored collaboratively with the Departments of Family Medicine

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and Psychiatry. Earlier programs centered upon practical issues in the diagnosis and treatment of geriatric problems.

This unique Program's success demonstrates that appropriate recognition of depression, dementia and other psychiatric conditions in the elderly can lead to a reduction of functional disability and an improvement in the quality of life.

About the Author

Jerold A. Glick, MS, is in the Office of Scientific Affairs at Jefferson Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University.