



Volunteers needed to support unique Hospital Elder Life Program

The successful Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP) at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) is looking for volunteers willing to contribute several hours a week with senior inpatients at NHH.

Delirium (acute confusion) and functional decline are common complications for many older hospitalized patients. In recent years, research conducted by Sharon K. Inouye, Professor of Medicine at Yale University, has shown that these negative side-effects can be avoided or minimized through a series of simple but deliberate "interventions". Hospitals across Ontario, including NHH, have established versions of Inouye's HELP program and it is now widely known for its success in preventing delirium and functional decline in hospitalized elderly patients.

Grouped into four categories, the interventions—designed for each patient by health professionals and an Elder Life Specialist and carried out by a team of assigned volunteers—include a Daily Visitor Program, Therapeutic Activities Program, Early Mobilization Program and the Meal Assistance Program.

What do HELP volunteers do?

Recruited through the NHH Auxiliary and guided by NHH's Elder Life Specialist (ELS), HELP volunteers work with a variety of inpatients on interventions customized to individual needs to help avoid delirium and functional decline.

Visits occur in either the morning or afternoon. HELP volunteers are expected to commit to one 3- to 4-hour "shift" a week for a minimum of six months. Typical patient assignments include visits to offer support and help orienting with hospital surroundings, participation in specific therapeutic activities such as a game of trivia or discussion of current events, companionship during mealtime and encouragement to stay as physically active as possible.

What difference can HELP volunteers make for hospital patients in our community?

HELP volunteers at NHH have an opportunity to make a real difference in a patient's life. Supported by the ELS, HELP volunteers:

- maintain older patients' physical and cognitive functioning during their hospital stay;
- maximize patient independence at discharge;
- help patients prepare for the transition from hospital to home; and
- help prevent an unplanned readmission.

"The NHH Auxiliary is continually recruiting volunteers for many areas of service," explains Gayle Metson, Auxiliary President. "The HELP opportunity is something unique. It isn't for everyone, because we're not all comfortable getting to know patients this directly. For those who do find it appealing, it's a chance to get to know a patient and their family, have a direct, tangible impact on their care and, as the program's name says, HELP!"

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Best suited to those with patience and a passion for working with older adults, prior experience supporting or caring for seniors with chronic conditions is not required. Volunteers do not need experience in a health care profession. The opportunity is open to all those who complete the NHH Auxiliary's orientation program and satisfy requirements for criminal and/or vulnerable sector checks and immunization.

Interested volunteers are invited to contact Linda Smith, Director of Volunteers for the NHH Auxiliary, at 905-372-6811, ext. 4630 or by email at lsmith@nhh.ca.



Amy Ludolph, Elder Life Specialist and Recreation Therapist for NHH's Post-Acute Specialty Services Program with inpatient Bernice Keating, one of the many patients who can benefit from the support of a HELP volunteer

Do you suffer from chronic pain? You might benefit from a 13-week course at NHH this fall

For some, particularly those with autoimmune disorders, pain is a constant presence. Standard medical interventions—medication, surgery—fail to bring relief and they live with pain, at some level, day in and day out.

Dr. Jackie Gardner-Nix has built an entire medical practice around her desire to help such patients. Now, thanks to the expanding Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) program at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH), she is bringing that practice to this community.

Trained in England, Gardner-Nix worked with patients in London (Ontario), Scarborough and Toronto before, most recently, establishing a practice in Northumberland and, specifically, the OTN connection in NHH's community mental health services at 1011 Elgin Street West, Cobourg, now serve as Gardner-Nix's part-time base for her innovative work exploring the pain relief that "mindfulness" and formal meditation practice can bring.

"Health care is changing," says Gardner-Nix, "taking into account the essential mind/body connection."

"Among the many skills taught, what we're doing in mindfulness work through our Mindfulness-Based Chronic Pain Management Program is showing patients their triggers for pain. Once they know their triggers, they can learn how to manage them," says Gardner-Nix.

"There is no typical patient," she concedes, "Generally I work with those who suffer chronic pain—pain lasting more than six months or beyond normal healing time. Patients who have found relief came to me with a range of chronic conditions, including arthritis, fibromyalgia, migraines, Crohn's disease, depression, pelvic pain, insomnia and lower back pain. Most of my patients suffer from pain that has not responded to the usual medical interventions. Many are women, but not all, and the average age is 45."

Gardner-Nix is offering a 13-week course for patients and a related 10-week course for health-care providers this fall. Set to launch at NHH in September, the courses aim to shift patients from a life of chronic pain and the "revolving door" of medical help to permanent, self-directed relief.

Referral instructions and further background on Mindfulness-Based Chronic Pain Management will be found in the related news release on nhh.ca or by contacting Patti Ley, NHH's OTN Coordinator, at 905-372-6811, ext. 3050.

Annual Meeting Highlights and 2013/14 Report to the Community

NHH's Annual Meeting was held last month. Approximately 50 people attended the June 19th meeting chaired by outgoing Board Chair Doug Mann, including Board Directors, volunteers, hospital staff and residents interested in hospital and healthcare services in west Northumberland.

Though the year was not without its fiscal challenges, NHH concluded 2013/14 with a small surplus from operations of \$14,166 on a \$65 million budget, thus meeting its Hospital Service Accountability Agreement with the Central East Local Health Integration Network. In addition, NHH received one-time Working Capital Assistance funding of \$422,900 for the purpose of paying down existing debt.

Reflecting on his past two years in the Chair's seat Doug Mann said: "Many challenges continue, such as the healthcare requirements of a community that is considerably older than the provincial average, but I believe our hospital is well positioned."

At the Board meeting immediately following the Annual Meeting of the Members, Board Directors unanimously appointed Jack Russell as the Board's Chair for the next two years.

For full details on the meeting, including highlights from the remarks of keynote speaker Leslee Thompson, President and CEO of Kingston General Hospital, Board Director changes and By-law amendments, please see the related news release on nhh.ca. NHH's 2013/14 Annual Report to the Community will be found in the same website's Document Archive. Hard copies are available on request from Stacy Connell at sconnell@nhh.ca or by calling 905-372-6811, ext. 4004.



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