

Life: Act 2 Prime Time Article
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Elder Care Advocate Program Expands to Shands

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Since receiving close to a \$1 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2006, United Way's Life: Act 2 initiative has focused on improving the systems and organizations older adults depend on and turn to when they need services.

Much of this work has concentrated on enhancing long-term care and supportive services for at risk older adults and integrating health and social service systems so that seniors have easy access to a more holistic approach to treatment and services.

As part of this effort, in May the first "Elder Care Advocate" began working with Baptist Medical Center downtown. The Advocate communicates with hospital discharge planners and social workers to coordinate care for identified seniors and their caregivers as they go home. The Elder Care Advocate serves as a focused, special link to the community. The Advocate also coordinates referrals to post-discharge care providers and maintains records of the seniors and their long term care support. The objective is to help them go home with necessary support and services to aid in their recovery and promote independence after discharge.

The Elder Care Advocate Program has now expanded to Shands Jacksonville, where seniors in the program and their caregivers, if any, are being connected to and educated about available community and health care resources upon discharge.

Helping seniors, even those who are frail with limited mobility, remain at home and as independent as possible has been a trend around the country. Recent Census data indicates that the percentage of elderly living in nursing homes has declined and that the downturn reflects the improved health of seniors and more choices of care for the elderly.

According to a recent article published in *USA Today* on this topic, approximately 7.4% of Americans aged 75 and older lived in nursing homes in 2006, compared with 8.1% in 2000 and 10.2% in 1990. The percentage of the oldest age group of seniors living in nursing homes has also been dropping. Less than 16% of the 85-plus population was in such facilities in 2006, according to the Census. In 1985, more than 21% in that age group lived in nursing homes.

"With the average cost of nursing home care at more than \$67,000 a year, based on a 2006 MetLife Market Survey of Nursing Home and Home Care Costs, and older adults' desire to age at home increasing, the Elder Care Advocate Program we've initiated is among the leading programs in the nation addressing this issue," said Life: Act 2 Director Mark LeMaire. "The importance of what we're doing will continue to grow as the baby

boomers age. We're definitely on the right track and we're offering a significant service to the seniors in our community."

To learn more about the Elder Care Advocate program, contact Mark LeMaire at 390-3234.