

## **Improving Elder Training for Health and Long Term Care Providers**

Improving the quality of life for the seniors of our community has been the fundamental goal of United Way's Life: Act 2 initiative since its inception. To help facilitate this objective within the health and long-term care systems that work with our aging population and frail seniors, in particular, United Way applied for and received a four-year, \$1 million grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 2006.

This first year, RWJF is funding United Way to take a broad look and learn what local agencies, long-term care providers, institutions of higher-learning, and hospitals are doing in helping their personnel to better handle and care for older adults. In an attempt to understand what local leaders are already doing in this area, United Way recently convened a meeting of community stakeholders and experts. Representatives from organizations including FCCJ, UNF, ElderSource, Brooks Health, Mayo Clinic, Baptist Health, UF Shands Jacksonville, St. Vincent's and others participated in a discussion facilitated by Dr. Donna Regenstreif, formerly of the Hartford Foundation and a nationally-recognized geriatrics expert.

"We had a productive, informative discussion and gathered valuable information about the current landscape of geriatric education within the medical community of North Florida," said Mark LeMaire, Director of Life: Act 2. "We've taken an important step to identify gaps and potential collaboration opportunities." Michael Korn, Chair of the Life: Act 2 Partnership Council said, "There was incredible enthusiasm and expertise in the room. We cannot afford to have great but isolated efforts."

United Way is hoping to encourage and develop appropriate cross-training opportunities among the hospitals and other facilities that treat and care for seniors. In addition, it is hoping to enable those interested in acquiring certification specific to caring for elders to acquire and maintain them and other similar credentials.

When asked about geriatric programming they would ideally like to offer to their staffs, many discussion participants agreed that enrichment programs focusing on nursing care for older patients in acute care settings would be beneficial for the practitioners as well as the patients. In addition, more certification preparation and education regarding the physiologic changes in the elderly would have positive and practical application in hospital and long-term care settings. Discussion also centered in around the invaluable role of caregivers.

United Way will continue to work with the participants of the forum, with next steps focusing on building consensus about the community needs and developing a strategy

that addresses those needs with on-going training and education for health care professionals.