

## Nurse Practitioner Smooths Way for Geriatric Patients

For someone who spends each day helping geriatric patients find their way through the processes and procedures of the Emergency Department (E.D.), Jon Sugarman, RN, MSN, certainly took a circuitous route himself before landing at Overlook.

Since early spring, Sugarman has served in the hospital's E.D. as a geriatric nurse practitioner, a newly created position designed to address the needs of patients over the age of 65. But his career path actually began in the business world, where he spent 35 years in a variety of ventures before deciding that the time was right to pursue a future in the medical field, an area that had always been of interest to him.

"It was actually my wife [pediatrician Jean Haymond, MD] who suggested that I try nursing," Sugarman recalls. "So I tested the waters at a local community college, taking anatomy and physiology right off the bat to see if I had what it takes to succeed at this."

Moving on to the BSN program at the University of Medicine & Dentistry of New Jersey, Sugarman later completed his master's degree there—a dual degree in adult and geriatric advance practice nursing. His work at Carrier Clinic in Belle Mead confirmed for him that he most enjoyed the time he spent with elderly patients, which ultimately led him to what he calls a "once-in-a-career opportunity" at Overlook.

"There aren't many of us out there," explains Sugarman, referring to the geriatric nurse practitioner position. "The E.D. is a busy place, and can be a particularly stress-filled environment for the elderly. I think what I can offer them is time—time to just let them talk and perhaps find out things that might not be readily apparent up front."

The topics Sugarman discusses with his patients include everything from possible prescription interactions to information about

existing psychological issues or needs. If a geriatric patient stays in the E.D. for any length of time, there is the risk of a predisposition to pressure ulcers that can be lessened with appropriate bedding and care. Often, a patient will move through multiple settings during an E.D. visit, which can increase confusion. This same challenge might occur upon discharge, when a patient and/or a caregiver receives instructions that they may not fully understand.

In an effort to improve communication between the E.D. and local nursing homes, Sugarman has visited several facilities to meet their nursing staffs and encourage them to call him directly for information about patients currently under Overlook's care. "This has already begun to pay dividends," Sugarman reports. "Not only have I been able to provide status updates to the nursing-home staffs, but they've supplied me with information that has proved very useful in the patients' care here at Overlook."

The geriatric nurse practitioner position in the E.D. was inspired by and, in part, funded by Mrs. Amy Liss, a longtime supporter of the hospital who, in her concern about care for elderly patients, felt an urgent need to push for an E.D. Continuity of Care Program. This calls for the geriatric nurse practitioner to do the following:

- Assess specific patients based on age, point of origin, and transfer of care to a different physician.
- Communicate directly with the sending physician or facility.
- Review overall goals of care and make appropriate recommendations or referrals.
- Assist hospitalists in developing a plan of care.
- Review the plan and instructions with the patient and caregiver.
- Help staff manage pain and dementia-related symptoms.
- Provide education for E.D. staff.
- Work with specially trained volunteers to focus on such items as comfort, reassurance, and agitation management.



Jon Sugarman, RN, MSN (seen here reviewing charts in Overlook's Emergency Department), is currently completing his Doctor of Nursing Practice degree at UMDNJ, where he is writing a thesis on using geriatric nurse practitioners in Emergency Departments to exact better outcomes.