



FEBRUARY 2020

Senior Services News

Our Final Newsletter

Our community, like our nation and most developed nations, is aging. Medicare currently has about 44 million beneficiaries, and this is expected to increase to 79 million by 2030. At the same time there is more and more that medicine has to offer in terms of cures, treatments, investigative tools, and other solutions. Most of these new things don't come cheap, and most do not end up saving money in the long run.

After more than 40 years practicing primary care medicine, it is my experience that what saves cost are attention to the simple low-tech fundamentals – timely access to your doctor, good and fast two-way communication with your health care provider's office, and active listening by your doctor and the office staff. On top of that, many seniors and their families need simple logistical solutions to the essential challenges of their daily routine – confinement, isolation, alienation, and loss of autonomy. Failure to address these challenges at the earliest stage leads to anxiety, suffering, emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and escalating costs.

In the early 2000's Arlene Phillips pioneered John Muir Health Senior Services which provided geriatric care coordination to frail elders, patient navigators to assist patients and families, the Medication Assistance Program for cash-strapped seniors, and elder health screenings to the community. Arlene wanted John Muir Health and our community as a whole to become a more senior-friendly place. As a doctor who cared for seniors I very much appreciated these innovations, and when Arlene decided to take on a Senior Services medical director, I jumped at the chance, and was delighted to be hired!

This newsletter became a feature of Senior Service in 2006. I have tried on its front page to deliver simple bedrock topics, the attention to which will bring maximum impact on your health – diet, exercise, memory loss, fall prevention, etc; the low-tech daily fundamentals that are of primary importance in preserving what you value most – your independence and your quality of life.

But health care costs continue to rise, and health care systems across the nation are struggling with declining revenues in the face of an aging population and relentless increases in the prices of almost anything labelled medical.

John Muir Health has been undergoing an organizational transformation in the past few years in response to these challenges. As part of that, Senior Services and I as Medical Director, will be going away as a separate entity – as will this newsletter – and its functions will be subsumed into the case management and logistical services of the larger John Muir Health System. We hope this will provide efficiencies that will be budget friendly while not compromising the quality of service to seniors we want to provide.

“Attention to the fundamentals” was an early life lesson provided to me by my high school basketball coach. He stressed that crisp passing, staying in a ready crouch, never dribbling when you could pass the ball, and running faster than the other team would win more games than having innate talent. And we won many more games than expected for a bunch of low-talent kids from a rural high school in Nova Scotia. I have been a “religious fundamentalist” ever since!

So in that sense, I believe that attention to the fundamentals of active listening, attention to basic needs and hazards, getting back to people as quickly as possible, taking time to explain, and strong teamwork will still be needed to underpin any future benefits that medical science and technology can provide. Senior Services has always been about the fundamentals, and it has been a great honor for me to serve as medical coach and cheerleader for this great team!

Although I am retiring as Medical Director, I plan to remain in my “day job” as a family physician. For the time being, retirement remains just a nice place to visit! Keep well, and never lose sight of the fundamentals!

Lawren Hicks, MD
Medical Director, Senior Services



It has been our great pleasure and honor to have provided support and services to all of you; patients, families, community partners and John Muir Health colleagues. We hope we have enriched your lives and made a difference in the quality of your life. We deeply regret having to inform you that as of March 2, 2020 Senior Services will be closing our doors. The Senior Services team would like to thank you for the opportunity to be of service to you and for sharing your stories, letting us into your homes, and opening our hearts. It has been our privilege to provide our services with the support of John Muir Health.

Supervisor – Suzanne LMFT, at Walnut Creek Outpatient Center. Suzanne worked 23 years with John Muir Health Senior Services. She created the Geriatric Care Coordination Program and advocated successfully for the program to be available at every John Muir Health outpatient center. Suzanne assumed the leadership role at Senior Services after Arlene Phillips retired in 2013. She led the team through many transitions and always emphasized that listening to older adults and hearing their stories is key to providing quality health care to seniors.

Patient Navigator – Jane, at Walnut Creek Outpatient Center. Developed and expanded the patient navigator program as a robust support for primary care physicians and their patients. Jane co-wrote and co-produced the quarterly Senior Services Newsletter and enjoyed hosting many classes. Jane is our go to person for unique problems that required outside the box thinking.

Patient Navigator – Camila MSW, at Pleasanton and Berkeley Outpatient Centers. Camila developed our relationships and resources in Alameda County for both sites. Camila established our presence at the Berkeley Outpatient Center since it's opening in July 2018. Camila co-wrote and co-produced the Senior Services Newsletter and staffed many classes. Camila is the keeper of our community resource database that enables us to point patients and colleagues to resources in the community.

Medication Assistance Specialist – Linda CPhT, at Walnut Creek Outpatient Center. Linda single handedly managed the Prescription Medication Assistance Program. She helps both insured and uninsured patients. In 2019 she was able to provide over \$1,300,000 of medications at no cost to patients who would not have been able to afford those medications. It is not unusual to find patients stopping by her office to give her hug of thanks.

Geriatric Social Worker – Jill LCSW, at Rossmoor Outpatient Center. Jill opened our office at the Rossmoor Outpatient Center and established close working relationships with the primary care doctors. Jill has nurtured those relationships and integrated social work as a key resource for physicians and staff to offer their patients. She was awarded employee of the month in 2017 for the John Muir Physician Network.



*Back row left to right: Sara, Jill, Linda, Karen, Dr. Hicks
Front row left to right: Camila, Kellie, Jackie, Jane, Suzanne*

Geriatric Social Worker – Kellie LCSW, at Rossmoor Outpatient Center. She established her own relationships at Rossmoor Outpatient Center and with Jill, imbedded the model of Geriatric Care Coordination and grew it successfully. Kellie covers a wide geographic area with patients in the Rossmoor Outpatient Center, in Central Contra Costa and Solano Counties. Kellie brought a wealth of experienced working with older adults and patients with mental health needs.

Geriatric Social Worker – Sara MSW, at Walnut Creek Outpatient Center. Sara came to us from John Muir Home Health. She brought to Senior Services her experience as a medical social worker who worked with a variety of patients including frail elders and those with chronic and life threatening illnesses. Sara is a natural teacher and taught many classes through our health education offerings.

Geriatric Social Worker – Karen MSW, at Pleasanton Outpatient Centers. Karen launched and developed the Pleasanton site along with Camila, and developed close working relationships with primary care physicians and their staff in the Tri-Valley area. Karen brought years of experience in working with patients in hospice and palliative care.

Geriatric Social Worker – Jackie LCSW, at Brentwood Outpatient Center. Our newest team member supports the East County primary care physicians, their staff, and the outpatient case management team in Brentwood. Jackie brought over 5 years of experience working with families in crisis where her empathy and compassion transferred easily to our senior population.

So it is time to say goodbye. We wish you all good health, good times, and be kind to each other.

Senior Services Team

