Acute Care for the Elderly (ACE) Unit

PHILOSOPHY OF CARE

Our elderly population has different care needs. For example, a mild fever in an elderly patient can cause confusion leading to a fall and to a bone fracture. Confusion from new medications can make describing symptoms difficult for older patients. Mild problems, such as dehydration, can quickly exacerbate illness and diminished skin integrity delays wound healing and immune responses.

The ACE Unit first opened at Christiana Hospital in 2004 and at Wilmington Hospital in 2007. All ACE Unit staff must complete We Improve Senior Health (WISH), an in-house specialized training program developed by Patricia M. Curtin, M.D., FACP, CMD, Chief of Geriatric Medicine, and Denise Lyons, Geriatric CNS. In an interdisciplinary approach to care, geriatricians, nurses, social workers, case managers, cardiologists, neurologists, pharmacists and occupational and physical therapists collaborate on a personalized plan of care that includes a comprehensive discharge plan.

THE NEW ACE UNIT

The Wilmington Hospital ACE Unit, moves to the 8th floor of the South tower in the fall of 2016. The new unit will have 30 private patient rooms in a patient and family friendly environment. Rooms will be larger to allow for specialized equipment for older adults, and nurses’ stations will be designed to allow for maximum patient visibility. Plans also include space for rehabilitation, a shared day room and a family meeting room.

Common areas will be inviting for patients and their families to watch a movie or simply visit, creating a space for patients to feel comfortable outside of their private rooms. Every detail will greatly impact the patient’s experience by encouraging independence and mobility and mitigating risks for falls, infections and delirium. For example, items will be larger so that elderly patients can see them from across the room; lighting will be softer making it easier for patients’ vision to focus; and handrails will be placed throughout patient rooms, hallways and in shared spaces.

“I was just enveloped with love and understanding. They knew what they were doing. They kept saying, ‘you’re going to be okay.’”

— Patty Dover, age 78, speaks about her experience in the ACE Unit.
In fact, the new ACE Unit is among the highly-specialized services that will refocus Wilmington Hospital as Christiana Care Health System’s Geriatric Center. The Swank Memory Care Center will also soon relocate to the Wilmington Campus.

**ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY**

Funds raised for the ACE Unit will go directly to the patient environment, equipment and materials that can sustain and improve functional, psychosocial and cognitive abilities – the keys to independent living. Even small improvements can provide substantial benefits in quality of life and influence decision making surrounding the patient’s ability to live independently. Philanthropy can provide:

- Beds that are low-set to help prevent falls;
- Pressure-relieving mattresses to minimize the risk of developing skin breakdown;
- Breathable limb protectors to ensure skin integrity;
- Geriatric friendly recliners;
- Assistive devices for eating, dressing, and standing; and
- A day room with leisure and educational materials.

With these resources in hand, patients’ short and long-term outcomes can be positively impacted along with their sense of dignity.

**ACE Unit Quick Facts**

**NURSING AND MEDICAL STAFF QUALIFICATIONS**

- The ACE Unit nursing staff is passionate about geriatrics. Sixty percent of the nurses are certified in gerontology, 70 percent of the nursing staff hold a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), while the remaining 30 percent are enrolled in a BSN program.
- All ACE Unit staff are required to participate in We Improve Senior Health (WISH) a 16-hour internal course.
- Dr. Curtin, Ace Unit Medical Director, who is also a clinical assistant professor in medicine at Sidney Kimmel College of Medicine at Thomas Jefferson University, manages numerous programs designed to address seniors’ needs, such as preventing falls, managing medications and coping with conditions such as skin integrity, incontinence and memory disorders. She organizes rotations and curricula to educate residents about geriatric medicine.

**FACILITIES**

- The current ACE Unit at Wilmington Hospital has a total of 28 beds in shared patient rooms, and the new ACE Unit will have 30 private patient rooms.
- Wilmington Hospital is becoming a Geriatric Center of Excellence for Christiana Care Health System.

**BENEFITS OF THE ACE UNIT ENVIRONMENT**

- Every detail of the ACE Unit is being carefully planned to create an environment that minimizes risk factors and encourages independence, quality of life and maintenance of functional abilities in acutely ill geriatric patients.
- Inpatient care for older adults differs from general adult care. Major categories of impairment that sometimes affect older adults are immobility, instability, incontinence and impaired intellect/memory.
- The prevention of confusion and disorientation, which can quickly escalate into falls, broken bones, wounds and other complications, is essential to excellent geriatric care.