



University of Pittsburgh INSTITUTE ON AGING

in partnership with University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

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A team approach to your care...

For the older adult, a team of health professionals often works together to evaluate and provide health care treatment and management. Some of the team members that may be involved in providing your care are listed below. When selecting health care professionals, you may want to ask whether they have completed special training to better understand and meet the needs of older adults.

Primary Health Care Team Members

Patient

As the patient, you are the primary focus of the team. All of the team's actions are focused on meeting your special needs and improving your overall health and well-being.

Family

Your family may also play an important role in the team effort to provide you with care. Your family may help the team by offering information that can help determine the best treatment option for you.

Geriatric Assessment Team

The geriatric assessment team is a multidisciplinary team of health care professionals, generally led by a geriatrician, who work together to evaluate and manage the health care needs of older adults.

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Primary Care Physician (PCP)

This is the primary medical doctor (MD or DO) in charge of your care. He or she may also consult other doctors who may examine and work with you.

Under a health maintenance organization (HMO) or point-of-service plan, a primary care physician (PCP) is the first contact for health care. A primary care physician — usually a general practitioner — is often used as a “gatekeeper” to make referrals to health care specialists, as necessary.

Geriatrician

A geriatrician is the medical doctor who is specially trained to manage the unique and, oftentimes, multiple health concerns of older adults. While the primary care physicians — general internists and family physicians — care for most older people, geriatricians frequently are consulted and/or provide the primary care for older adults who have complicated medical and social problems.

Nurse (RN)

Nurses play a critical role in delivering and monitoring your care. They carefully watch your condition and inform the doctor of any changes so that your treatment plan can be modified if necessary. Nurses give medications and work with other departments to coordinate your care.

Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) and Patient Care Assistant (PCA)

These are health care professionals who may work with RNs to care for you.

Nurse Practitioner (NP) or Physician Assistant (PA)

Nurse practitioners or physician assistants may also assist in providing your care. These specially trained individuals work under the direction of a physician and may help by obtaining your medical history, performing physical exams, or assisting with treatments and procedures.

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Other Specialists

A specialist may be asked to review your care and make recommendations for your treatment.

Geropsychiatrist

This is the medical doctor who is specially trained to evaluate, diagnose, and treat mental and emotional disorders in older adults. The geropsychiatrist may prescribe medications and provide counseling and support.

Geriatric Care Manager

A geriatric care manager is a professional, usually a social worker or nurse, with experience in geriatric care, who performs an individual assessment, establishes a care plan and oversees the care of an older adult. The geriatric care manager provides counseling and support to the patient and family when there are concerns about the diagnosis, its effects on day-to-day activities, marital and family relationships, friendships, employment and finances. The geriatric care manager serves as a valuable resource for obtaining information about support groups and other support services available in the community.

Audiologist

This therapist evaluates how well you can hear and will help to determine how to appropriately meet your needs.

Optometrist

This specialist evaluates how well you can see and will help to determine how to appropriately meet your needs.

Dentist

This professional is specially trained to evaluate and treat diseases and injuries of the mouth—particularly the teeth, jaws, and gums. Dentists can provide you with dentures to replace missing teeth.

Podiatrist

This specialist evaluates and treats disorders, diseases, and injuries of the foot.

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Pharmacist

Pharmacists review and dispense medications ordered by your doctor and provide you and your family with important drug information.

Nutrition Specialist (RD)

A nutritionist, also known as a registered dietitian (RD), is a professional with special education and experience in the management of nutritional needs for older adults. The nutrition specialist works with older adults who experience appetite problems, weight loss, or difficulty chewing, and monitors diets to make sure foods are being consumed to promote health and well-being.

Special Educators

You may also meet with specially trained staff who will help you if you have special conditions, such as diabetes, heart problems, stroke, etc.

Therapists

Physical Therapist (PT)

This therapist works with you to improve mobility, restore strength, and coordinate your body movements. He or she can help you resume walking, learn how to use a wheelchair, or transfer you from your bed to a chair.

Respiratory Therapist (RT)

This therapist can help you to breathe more easily through the use of special treatments or breathing machines.

Speech Therapist

This specialist evaluates the sound of your voice and how well you are able to swallow your food. He or she will help to determine how to appropriately strengthen your voice and manage any swallowing problems.

Occupational Therapist (OT)

This therapist helps teach learning skills and techniques to help you perform your regular activities of daily living and remain as independent as possible.

Assistive Technologist

An assistive technologist is a professional specially trained to determine the best type of assistive technology and equipment to help you function.

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Other Professionals

Clinical Research Coordinator

Clinical research coordinators assist you with participation in clinical research studies. If you decide to participate in a clinical trial, this health professional monitors your care while in the study and relays information back to your health care team to maximize the benefits of your participation.

Home Health Staff

These professionals provide skilled nursing care in your home. Your physician should arrange home health services for you if you qualify for skilled care.

Residents/Fellows/Students

As the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center is an academic (teaching) medical center, individuals in various stages of their training may work with your health care team to provide you with the best care.

Pastoral Services

Chaplains are available at many facilities to talk with you and your family or to contact a personal pastor or religious leader, if desired.

Financial counselor

A financial counselor helps you and your family understand your insurance coverage, billing for health care services, details about the cost of care, and options for payment.