

Volunteer Opportunities

The Hospital Elder Life Program



UPMC
Shadyside

The Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP) is designed to offer special services to older adults while hospitalized on designated units at UPMC Shadyside.

Between 30 percent and 50 percent of all seniors experience a decline in their physical and mental abilities during a hospital stay. The decline may involve ...

- new or increased confusion
- falls, dizziness, pressure ulcers, malnutrition, immobility, or incontinence
- more difficult recovery from illness
- decreased independence and quality of life

HELP is a quality improvement program whose mission is to prevent older patients from experiencing a decline in both their physical and mental health during their hospital stay. In addition, HELP is committed to providing personalized care for seniors, through maintaining an environment that supports and encourages independence.



"Thank you for the excellent care and positive experience with the Elder Life Program. HELP provided that extra attention my mom needed. I thank you!"

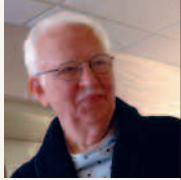
— patient's family

Why Volunteer?

- opportunity to give back to the community
- experience of personal richness in helping, listening to, and empowering older adults
- direct quality interaction with patients
- complimentary parking (and meal ticket for shifts lasting more than four hours)

What Makes HELP Unique for Volunteers:

- face-to-face contact with hospitalized patients
- team-oriented program
- training and supervision provided, no medical experience required
- flexible shifts — 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week
- opportunity to be a part of a growing and cutting-edge health care environment
- credit-based internships available for students (3 to 12 credits)



"Each of my five contacts was a positive point of light in the context of some challenging physical problems. Hats off to everyone in the program."

— HELP patient

Our Care Plan for Seniors

Therapeutic activities are completed as a part of the hospital plan for seniors. Members of the HELP team, especially the volunteers, make visits to patients several times daily to provide extra attention to seniors, which can make a big difference in a patient's comfort level and recovery.

Meal Program:

Assists seniors during mealtime with completing menus, cutting food, opening cartons, and providing companionship. Volunteers also encourage fluids and nutritional supplements when indicated and can help with feeding when appropriate.

Recreation and Relaxation Program:

Provides interesting activities that keep patients mentally stimulated. Some examples are conversation, reminiscing, music, reading materials, and games. Volunteers also offer activities that promote relaxation and help ease symptoms of anxiety and depression.

"It's rewarding to be appreciated and to have responsibilities that make me feel like I can really make a difference."

— HELP volunteer



“It is a program where you get what you put into it. You can gain a tremendous amount of knowledge and also feel good about what you are doing for others.”

— HELP volunteer

Exercise Program:

Helps seniors through strength training, endurance exercises, assisted walking, and conditioning programs.

Communication and Comfort Program:

Orients patients to their surroundings and assures that important items are within reach (such as hearing and vision devices, the nurse call bell, and personal items). In addition, it provides the patient with direct opportunities to express needs and concerns to the volunteers.

experience the personal richness of

helping, listening, and empowering

“I’ve been here for three years. I learned about HELP when my father was hospitalized here. So many patients have family members who can’t be here for them all day, every day. I’m here for them because they need us.”

— HELP volunteer



Does HELP Really Help?

Preventing delirium (acute confusion) is the main objective measure of HELP’s success. HELP decreases the hospital’s delirium rate by 42 percent each year.

Volunteers complete nearly 2,000 activities with patients each month on each unit where HELP is offered. Most of these activities would not occur without the assistance of HELP volunteers.

Who is the HELP Team?

The HELP team consists of a specially skilled interdisciplinary staff:

- certified volunteers
- volunteer coordinators
- nursing staff
- geriatrician

The HELP team members work in partnership with the doctors and nursing staff to highlight issues specific to geriatric care and to provide education to patients and their families.



“I don’t think of the little things I need until asked if I need them — no complaints!”

— HELP patient

“The HELP program is an extremely satisfying volunteering experience for me because, after being carefully trained, I am using my time in a very significant way, dealing with a critical moment in hospitalized seniors’ lives.”

— HELP volunteer



To Learn More

If you are interested in volunteering, or in learning more about HELP, call:

412-623-HELP (4357)



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