



Ken Brummel-Smith: new Health and Aging Policy Fellow

To shape health policy

Ken Brummel-Smith, M.D., chair of the Department of Geriatrics, has long had an interest in health policy. He's been a vocal advocate on behalf of Physicians for a National Health Program and, as past president of the American Geriatrics Society, has a keen understanding of how health policy impacts health care, especially as it relates to older patients.

So it shouldn't come as a surprise that Brummel-Smith has been selected as a 2012-13 Health and Aging Policy Fellow. The program, funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, partners with the Healthy Aging Program at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The fellowship is designed to foster in health professionals the skills needed to influence development and implementation of health policies affecting older Americans.

Brummel-Smith will focus on getting the Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) accepted in Florida. He also will be exploring the possibility of a national model for POLST, which is intended to help individuals receive the end-of-life care they prefer, rather than care dictated by the nuances of the American health-care system.

Research has demonstrated that a POLST is more effective than living wills and advance

directives alone for ensuring patients get the care they want.

"In most encounters, policies play some role in medical decision-making," Brummel-Smith said, citing diverse examples: "A patient I see in the Neighborhood Health Services free clinic being required to pay a fee, or a patient I see at an upscale continuing-care retirement center going into the 'doughnut hole' if I prescribe a needed medication.

"The ideal is to create policies that foster the best care while containing costs, but such policies are rare."

Fellows are selected for the program based on their commitment and contributions to health and aging issues, leadership potential and interest in impacting policy. The program was designed to develop a network of geriatric and gerontology professionals able to contribute scientific and clinical knowledge to the arena of health-care policy.

"As a leader in geriatric health care and education for 30 years, I have seen the important role that health policy plays in achieving my career-long goal of improving care to older persons," Brummel-Smith said. "However, in spite of this long record of service, I am really looking forward to receiving guidance and training in policy development that only the fellowship can offer."