

Approaching old age

Florida already is home to the highest percentage of residents over age 65. Within 15 years the number is expected to double (to nearly 8 million), while available caregivers are becoming scarcer.

“It’s a dilemma, for sure,” said Paul Katz, who joined the College of Medicine in June as chair of the Department of Geriatrics.

Katz, a geriatrician, is optimistic that the College of Medicine, with its focus on geriatrics, can help provide solutions. He’s buoyed by a \$2.25 million grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration in a strategic effort to address similar problems nationwide.

The College of Medicine is one of 44 organizations in 29 states selected to participate in the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program.

“This goes well beyond what we teach medical students,” Katz said. “The ultimate goal is to enhance the workforce — nurses, social workers, primary-care physicians and the public. We’re not going to be adequately prepared to meet the needs of our older patients in Florida with anything less than a comprehensive approach.”

Often overlooked in the care of older patients is the free care provided by family members. Roughly 2.8 million of them provided an estimated \$29 billion worth of unpaid care to older Floridians in 2009. The state’s demographics show that many of those will need care themselves within the next 15 years and that there will be fewer potential caregivers available.

In addition, a third of the nursing workforce and 40 percent of the physician workforce nationwide is currently over age 50.

So how is the College of Medicine trying to help?

By partnering with the FSU colleges of Nursing and Social Work and with numerous College of Medicine affiliates statewide, for starters.

“Together we will be addressing health-care gaps through individual, system, community and population-level changes,” said Ken Brummel-Smith, Department of Geriatrics chair emeritus. “We will be developing six innovative projects that will allow for the creation of new service delivery models in addition to novel opportunities for interprofessional and interdisciplinary training and patient and caregiver education.”

For example, the college will sponsor caregiver workshops by specially trained social workers and community members at Westminster Communities locations throughout the state.

The college also will add a geriatrics-focused curriculum to medical residency programs already affiliated with the College of Medicine, and is partnering with the Health Care Network of Southwest Florida to enhance the care of older patients.

“All of our efforts,” Katz said, “are oriented toward developing a health-care workforce that maximizes patient and family engagement and improves health outcomes for older adults by integrating primary care and geriatrics.”



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