

## **Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta CELEBRATES TEN YEARS AS COMMUNITY PARTNER CARING FOR ATLANTA'S AGING POPULATION**

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Like many health care professionals, Catherine Ivy, Director, Specialty Services, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta is concerned that Atlanta's rapidly growing and aging population is going to outpace the services available. The older adult population in the Atlanta region doubled between 1970 and 2000 and will double again by 2015. By 2030, one in five residents will be over 60.

Answering Atlanta's changing health care needs is both complex and costly, but there is now a trend to help people manage their own health as they age. "Long-term care for older adults is a critical part of the health care continuum and can vastly improve people's quality of life," Ivy says.

"If we can catch their symptoms early and help them manage their chronic diseases, we can help them avoid premature decline," she adds. "We often see older adults trying to make do, living alone, worrying that they can't afford care and, even if they can afford it, not knowing where to find it."

As Georgia's first and most experienced home care organization, and the only community-based, non-profit in the field, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta addresses these needs through unique community programs in partnership with state and county government agencies.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's being awarded a contract from the Atlanta Regional Commission. Since then, the organization has worked with several programs for aging adults in the ten-country metro-Atlanta area. This translates to care management for more than 3,800 people a day through both Medicaid and non-Medicaid programs, and over 60,000 hours of care in the combined programs.

Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta has provided care coordination for the Georgia Department of Human Resources' Community Care Services Program (CCSP) since 1996, and case management for non-Medicaid home-based services in DeKalb and Fulton counties for the last three years. The organization is the only home health agency working with the DeKalb County Office of Senior Affairs, the Fulton County Office of Aging, and the CCSP. Staff includes 11 registered nurses, 43 social workers and an administrative team of seven.

"Geriatric care is one of the most overlooked areas of health care," says Mark Oshnock, who joined Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta as President and CEO in 2004. "Most health care professionals think of us as providing quality home care and hospice services, but we do so much more than that. We are senior specialists with a finger on the pulse of Atlanta's aging population.

"Many health care organizations think twice before partnering in these kinds of comprehensive, elder care programs," adds Oshnock. "But someone needs to do them, and do them well, with a clear understanding of their complexity. As a nonprofit with a strong home care and hospice business, Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta fills that need."

A key factor in an aging population is geriatric depression. Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta is well-versed in this area too. In 2002, CCSP managers began working with staff at the Fuqua Center for Late Life Depression at Emory University. Funded by the National Alliance for Suicide Prevention - older adults make up 20% of successful suicides today - the research project resulted in both an increase in the identification of depression and an increase in those being treated for the disorder.

Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta also collaborates with the Rollins School of Public Health in applied research on dementia funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The project teaches and implements

interventions around problem behaviors commonly seen in people with dementia. The ultimate goal of the project is to keep older adults in their homes, with family care-giving, and out of nursing homes and other institutional care.

Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta's extensive outreach also includes relationships with community organizations such as The Georgia Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association and the Jewish Federation, which funded a grant to provide home/health assessments and other services to Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities in East Point and an Atlanta Housing Authority community in Buckhead.

Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta is a member of the core leadership group of the Aging Atlanta Project. In that role, Oshnock and his team worked with over 15 healthcare and social organizations led by the Atlanta Regional Commission to get a grant for a three-year project designed to market aging services via a public media campaign. Shopping center kiosks and computer access in public libraries helped spread the word about available aging resources.

Atlanta's health care community benefits from these programs in a couple of significant ways. Doctors and hospitals experience smaller case loads among older patients whose minor health problems are handled through home care, while nursing and social work students get valuable experience. The Visiting Nurse | Hospice Atlanta Care Management Unit serves as field placement for several local universities including The University of Georgia, Georgia State University, Clark/Atlanta University, Kennesaw State University and Georgia Baptist School of Nursing of Mercer University.

"It's a win-win for all of us," says Oshnock. "As Atlanta ages, we can be part of the solution for the public and the health care community."

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