NOVANT HEALTH FORSYTH MEDICAL CENTER MAXIMIZES EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CARE FOR OLDER ADULT PATIENTS

In the U.S. now, 8,000 people turn 65 everyday. By the end of 2011 the senior population of America reached almost 49 million. By 2025, it will grow to nearly 72 million according to the Department of Health and Human Services and the State Department. In terms of geriatric health care challenges, we are reaching “perfect storm” proportions (Source: Institute of Medicine report, “Re-tooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce”).

The challenge facing our healthcare system is not due solely to the increased number of older adults. It’s also the lack of fundamental geriatric care knowledge. Older adults require different models of care compared to younger adults, and older patients demonstrate increased vulnerability, especially when they are hospitalized. Lack of recognition of geriatric syndromes during hospitalization is common and can contribute to poor outcomes leading to increased length of stay and higher costs. The specialized and complex care needs of the hospitalized older adult require specialty education for all disciplines of healthcare providers.

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders
Forsyth Medical Center chose to meet this challenge head on when they chose the Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders (NICHE) program in 1999. NICHE is the premier designation indicating a hospital’s commitment to excellence in the care of patients 65 years and older. NICHE provides resources, evidenced-based tools, structure, and a collaborative community to stimulate change and support the planning and implementation process. The focus is on programs and protocols that are dominantly under the control of nursing practice; in other words, areas where nursing interventions have a substantive and positive impact on patient care.

Since implementing the NICHE program, Forsyth Medical Center has taken major steps to better prepare its staff to provide expert care for the geriatric population and to ensure best practices at its facility including training geriatric resource nurses, fall-prevention activities, and improvements in transitions of care.

Exemplar Status
Following a recent evaluation of the NICHE program status (a requirement of maintaining NICHE designation), Forsyth Medical Center achieved NICHE “Exemplar” status. Strictly speaking, the hospital gained its new status as a result of its own geriatric-targeted actions. The Exemplar status recognizes Forsyth Medical Center’s ongoing, high-level dedication to geriatric nursing care and pre-eminence in the implementation and quality of system-wide interventions and initiatives that demonstrate organizational commitment to the care of older adults. The requirements include implementation of the NICHE Geriatric Resource Nurse (GRN) model and evidence-based protocols on all applicable units, including specialty units; implementation of systemic aging-sensitive policies; inclusion of the input of patient, families, and community-based providers in planning and implementation of NICHE initiatives; and assuming regional and national leadership roles.

The GRN is foundational to the NICHE program – the Geriatric Resource Nurse model is an educational and clinical intervention model that prepares staff nurses as clinical resource persons for geriatric issues available to other nurses on their unit.
“The NICHE designation and the Exemplar status signal our resolve to provide patient-centered care for older adults,” says Kelly Swauger, Director of Nursing. “Through our participation in the NICHE program we are able to offer evidence-based, interdisciplinary approaches that promote better outcomes, positive experiences, and improved care for our largest population of patients. This leads to greater satisfaction rates for our patients, their families and our staff.”

Program Evaluation
The evaluation process, administered by NICHE as the Annual Program Evaluation, is used to determine the level of their NICHE program. The evaluation allows hospitals to benchmark program progress year-to-year, targets future care initiatives and provides data to use in gaining and sustaining support from stakeholders. Dimensions that are measured during the program evaluation process include the organizational structure of the hospital, geriatric staff competence, environment of care and patient family involvement.

“Forsyth Medical Center’s evaluation demonstrated a tremendous ability to meet the needs of the older adult patient,” says Barbara Bricoli, MPA, Executive Director. “The hospital’s high intensity level in marshalling geriatric nursing resources and support to enhance care marks it as a leader in the field.”

About NICHE
Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders (NICHE) is an international program designed to help improve the care of older adults. The vision of NICHE is for all patients 65-and-over to be given sensitive and exemplary care. The mission of NICHE is to provide principles and tools to stimulate a change in the culture of healthcare facilities to achieve patient-centered care for older adults. NICHE, based at NYU College of Nursing, has over 550 hospitals and healthcare organizations from the U.S., Canada, Bermuda and Singapore in the network.

For more information visit www.nicheprogram.org