

Senior Friendly Hospital Care Conference  
**Senior Sensitivity Culture**

Robert S. Lester BA MD FRCP(C)

*All diseases run into one, old age*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson



## My Perspective

I am making this presentation from a number of personal perspectives:

- Physician
- Hospital Administrator
- Senior
- Patient
- Caregiver

In the latter three roles, I have experienced health care from the other side of the bed



## Understanding the Issues

- Hospitalization is trying at any age
- Elderly – the experience is associated with a host of separate issues, both mental and physical
- Feelings of loss, anxiety, frustration, anger, grief
- Even more emotionally overwhelming for people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds
- What seems trivial to a 25 year old may be of great importance to a patient of 85
- Important to ask what they feel needs to be done and listen
- Keep in mind that patience and perspective rule the day

## Potential Concerns of the Elderly (Stress & Anxiety)

*In hospitals, there are often great waiting periods between doctor's/nurse's visits, tests and procedures giving elderly time to reflect on plethora of age-related issues relating to mortality and failing health.*

- Coming to terms with death – being in hospital can be a reminder that no one lives forever
- Worrying about finances – can they afford medication, potential long term care
- Getting used to being dependent – many elderly see hospitalization as first step in becoming dependent on others; fear that they may become a burden
- Confronting memory loss – if noticed by patient, exacerbates all above mentioned concerns

## Key Considerations

- Recognize that poor care shown to many older people is a result of failing to respect them or to offer them dignity and privacy
- People who are different, vulnerable and less able to assert themselves can be at risk of being bullied, abused or ignored
- Understand that being told what to wear, what and when to eat, having sleep patterns disrupted by inflexible hospital routines, suddenly becoming dependent on others for personal needs like toileting and hygiene and being known as a room number vs. a name can all be dehumanizing

## Senior Friendly Hospital

- Ensure staff are trained in cultural awareness and appropriate communication
- Ensure cultural, linguistic and spiritual needs are addressed across all services including health and personal care, food services and leisure activities to assist in provision of culturally appropriate emotional support
- Understand that a person's expression of emotion, including his or her response to loss and grief, is influenced by culture
- Encourage families to visit and support
- Explore availability of volunteers to provide recreational visits to isolated patients in their preferred language

## Senior Friendly Hospital

- Recognize the importance of effective communication as core to providing patient centered care.
- Understand that lack of communication can lead to increased anxiety, powerlessness and vulnerability
- Recognize how we communicate can be as important as what we communicate
- Understand the profound difference between communicating TO patients and families and communicating WITH them
- Work to open up lines of communication among patients, families and providers
- Address anxiety by providing patients and families information to allow anticipation of what to expect during hospitalization and to help them plan for their needs when discharged

## Senior Friendly Hospital

- Try to personalize even the most routine interactions with patients
- Implement programs designed to validate patient preferences, preserve patients' normal routines (as much as possible), and maintaining their personal identity
- Consider the experience of body, mind and spirit of all that use the facility
- Implement programs designed to support the mind, body and spirit
- Recognize that at the heart of the environment of care are human interactions which can assist in transforming an institutional, impersonal, and alien setting into one that is truly healing

## Conclusions

Watching an elderly patient struggle with the effects of aging in hospital can be difficult. It is important to provide support, assure patients that they are not alone and that their needs will ultimately be met

- Gain insight into their perspective
- Listen to their ideas and concerns
- Offer assistance if possible
- Understand their end-of-care wishes

## Conclusions

- Part of the solution lies in resources and there are levels of under-resourcing that make poor care more likely
- Well-resourced hospitals can still provide poor care and vice versa
- Remember when all is said and done, **KINDNESS AND COMPASSION COST NOTHING!**

