

Friday, October 8, 2010

## **Park Plaza Hospital responds to aging trend with ER unit for seniors**

Houston Business Journal - by [Allison Wollam](#) Reporter

**W** Park Plaza Hospital and Medical Center has opened a new senior emergency department to meet the needs of a growing elderly demographic in the urban area.

Park Plaza's new unit provides customized care for older adults, with patient rooms and services tailored specifically for seniors.

The hospital, a 444-bed acute care facility at 1313 Hermann Dr., has existing partnerships with local nursing homes and senior living facilities. Nurses and physicians in the new department have been trained in geriatric emergencies, with special emphasis on increased mobility assistance.

"The older adult is the largest growing segment of the population," notes Dr. Kathryn Agarwal, a geriatric and internal medicine specialist at **W** Baylor College of Medicine who helped get Park Plaza's unit for the elderly up and running.

"It's important to understand that the older segment needs to be cared for differently," says Agarwal.

While most emergency rooms focus on treating problems such as broken arms and car accident injuries, the Park Plaza model concentrates on aiding seniors deal with chronic problems and getting them back to a better quality of life.

Agarwal says every private room features light dimmers, hearing and vision aids, special mattresses on stretchers and beds and nurses who are focused on increased mobility assistance.

"It's important for older patients to be able to hear the doctor clearly and to be able to tell the doctor exactly what is wrong with them," she says. "The private rooms cut out excess noise and also provide more bedside room for better quality of care."

The geriatric division of Baylor College of Medicine began working with Park Plaza, part of **W** Tenet Texas, in 2008 to better address the needs of seniors.

Park Plaza studied patient demographics and found a large percentage of senior citizens were being admitted to the hospital and making emergency room visits.

"Caring for the niche of older adult patients is now the future of the hospital," says Agarwal.

Richard Schirmer, vice president of Health Care Policy Analysis for the [Texas Hospital Association](#), says the high level of uncompensated care seen by hospitals in Texas makes attracting patients with insurance such as Medicare a method of offsetting losses incurred from the treating the uninsured and underinsured.

“I’m not sure of the payer mix for this facility, but being located in an area with an uninsured rate of approximately 30 percent, I would assume they have a sizeable amount of uncompensated care,” he says.

Schirmer adds that Park Plaza is smart to focus on the needs and demographics of the surrounding community.

“Due to their age and medical condition, these patients are more prone to need comprehensive medical care,” he says.

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