

# Senior-Friendly Excellence in Healthcare

by Nicola Levasseur, RN

The Elliot NICHE (Nurses Improving Care for Health System Elders) Team has had a busy and successful 2015. NICHE is the leading national geriatric nursing program that focuses on the care of the hospitalized older adult. A healthcare facility may elect to apply for this prestigious designation. A site evaluation is then completed by NICHE upon which the designation may be granted to the organization should they meet the qualifications. Once designation is extended, NICHE evaluates the facility annually to ensure that the best practices, interventions, protocols and overall geriatric care that is provided by the facility continues to meet NICHE standards. NICHE offers four levels of designation – Early Implementation, Progressive Implementation, Senior Friendly Implementation and Exemplar Implementation. Elliot Hospital received NICHE designation in 2010. For the past five years, our geriatric programs and service lines have grown significantly. Across our healthcare system, there are many who are responsible for the growth and quality of our geriatric services, and this was easily recognized during our last annual designation evaluation. In August, the NICHE team was delighted to announce that as an organization we succeeded in increasing our level of designation to SENIOR FRIENDLY. We are now one of only two hospitals in the State of New Hampshire who have achieved this level of NICHE designation.

Many may be asking, “what does a Senior Friendly Elliot mean for me and my family?” Developing a nursing force who are highly skilled and certified in providing geriatric care through the encouragement of advancing professional nursing practice, NICHE aims to import education, principles and tools to stimulate change and provide support in the healthcare



environment to help healthcare facilities provide exemplary patient-centered care for their older adult community.

Elliot’s NICHE team is a collaborative inter-disciplinary membership representing Geriatric Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pharmacy, Senior Health Primary Care, and Acute Care Nursing Staff. The team aims to increase understanding of the normal aging process, improve communication with older adult patients and their families/caretakers, and work together to develop and implement the appropriate interventions and best-practice evidence to improve outcomes for our older adults. Overall the group hopes by working together to increase awareness of the above-mentioned strategies, that in turn the surrounding community will recognize Elliot as an elder friendly healthcare system.

To date, the team has led the development and implementation of an inpatient Delirium Protocol designed specifically for the hospitalized older adult. Once graduated from the pilot phase, this protocol will impact all inpatient adult units in the hospital. Alongside a marketing campaign, the team produced professional NICHE brochures intended for the patient/ family member and that will be distributed to the outpatient practices.

What’s next on the agenda for the team in 2016? The team plans to work on the two inpatient protocols (Delirium and Constipation), and partner with our volunteer department to develop some creative strategies to improve our older adult patient experiences.

The journey thus far to Senior-Friendly excellence has been an exciting one; however the NICHE team hopes for even more. One thing is for certain, Elliot is ready to embark on their final NICHE destination... Exemplar Status.

*Elliot Health System*