

Hospital Elder Life Program (H.E.L.P.) Summary

The project submitted to Practice Change Leaders for Aging and Health was for the development and implementation of the H.E.L.P. program on our Pulmonary Specialty Unit (PSU) at UnityPoint Health - Cedar Rapids, Iowa. H.E.L.P. is a national program developed by health care experts at Yale University to prevent delirium and physical decline in hospitalized older adults. The goal of this project is to improve the hospital care for older patients by integrating the principles of geriatrics into standard nursing and medical care on the PSU. This includes the innovative volunteer model offered through the H.E.L.P. program to provide personal and supportive attention to this vulnerable population. Personal attention and support are caring services that are valued by patients and their families, leading to increased patient satisfaction and outcomes.

An emphasis of this program is on maintaining cognitive and physical functioning of high-risk older adults throughout hospitalization. The H.E.L.P. program will make a difference in the lives of the older adult by aiding them in successfully returning to their homes or previous living situations with maintained or improved ability to function. This program will provide an organized system to actually do what we know “should be done” when taking care of the older adult.

A goal will be to create a geriatric team with the PSU staff working closely with the Hospitalists to identify patients at risk and develop a multidisciplinary plan of care. H.E.L.P. volunteers will have an essential role in that plan of care which will help prevent adverse events and enhance a safe transition to the next level of care. A desired outcome will be to develop a robust H.E.L.P. volunteer program that will provide the needed supportive care, which will in return give the nursing staff more capacity to implement other identified H.E.L.P. interventions.

We live our personal mission statement, and it is a strong influential force in our organization: ***To Give the Care We Would Like Our Loved Ones to Receive.*** Ultimately, the primary beneficiary of the efforts of this project is the older adult population, their families and caregivers.