

AMERICA’S HEALTHIEST HOMETOWN

A weekly report on The Villages’ efforts to become “America’s Healthiest Hometown” compiled by Daily Sun Ombudsman **Larry D. Croom**. Email larry.croom@thevillagesmedia.com. Or call him at 753-1119, ext. 9366.

Contact The Villages Health at 352-674-1700 or visit the website at thevillageshealth.com.

Did you know?

Dr. Mariel Gonzalez Mendoza, a physician at the Pinellas Care Center, is a fan of the 1988 hit movie “Rain Man.”

Fixing health care: All about Dr. Farhaad Golkar

Primary care doctors, specialists and other medical providers have been recruited as part of an initiative to revamp health care right here in Florida’s Friendliest Hometown. The Villages Health is partnering with USF Health to bring in family doctors, care providers and specialists who will work as a team, all in the best interests of serving patients. This weekly feature will introduce these innovative medical providers who have joined this effort.

Why did you become a general surgeon?

When you take physicians, you can break them up into two groups – medical doctors and surgical doctors. I knew pretty much from the beginning I didn’t want to be a medical doctor because I liked working with my hands and I kind of liked seeing immediate results and treating acute problems, not chronic problems. So that led me to surgery. And then, of the different fields of surgery, general surgery seemed to be the one that was the most broad and had the highest number of diseases and problems and organs to work on. That’s why I liked it – it was broad.

What is your favorite thing about being a general surgeon?

Taking care of patients. Seeing a patient who has a problem – specifically one that I can fix, such as a cancer or a problem with their gallbladder or a problem with their appendix – and then operating on them and essentially curing that problem. It doesn’t happen all the time, but when it does, it’s an unbelievable feeling.

Do you think the initiative here can change health care across America?

I think it definitely could.



Care center: USF Health Specialty Care Center in The Villages
Age: 35
Undergraduate: Emory University (Atlanta)
Medical school: University of South Florida Morsani College of Medicine
Board certified: General surgery
Fellow: American College of surgeons
Internship, residency: USF (department of surgery at Tampa General Hospital)
Fellowship: Advanced gastrointestinal surgery; hepato-pancreato-biliary surgery (USF at Tampa General Hospital)

They’ve made a great effort in doing it here.

Coming April 6: Find out all about Dr. Michael Wald, a primary care physician who practices at the Mulberry Care Center.

Creating America’s Healthiest Hometown

What is the big advantage to having a limited number of patients to care for?

“It means that I don’t have to worry about giving people adequate care. If I build up a relationship with people, I will have the time to see them. When you call me tomorrow morning and you’re not doing well, I’m going to be able to get you in. Not three weeks from now – today, tomorrow. I don’t have to worry about not being able to spend time with you. It gives me the time that I need and that you deserve.”

Dr. Michael Wald,
Mulberry Grove
Care Center



Care Centers in The Villages

Primary care

The Villages Health Colony Care Center

280 Farner Place, 352-674-1710

The Villages Health Santa Barbara Care Center

1575 Santa Barbara Blvd., 352-674-1740

The Villages Health Pinellas Care Center

2485 Pinellas Place, 352-674-1720

The Villages Health Mulberry Grove Care Center

8877 S.E. 165th Mulberry Lane, 352-674-1750

The Villages Health Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center

1050 Old Camp Road, Building 100 (Opening mid-April)



Bill Mitchell / Daily Sun

Dr. David Meltzer, a physician, researcher and chief of the Section of Hospital Medicine at the University of Chicago, says he appreciates the way The Villages Health is striving to find ways to care for the entire population of Florida’s Friendliest Hometown. Meltzer is one of nine Villages Health Scholars who are offering valuable input on the health care initiative that’s sweeping through Florida’s Friendliest Hometown.

‘Exciting’ opportunities

Physician/economist says initiative can lead to positive changes in health care

One in a continuing series of stories on Villages Health scholars – nine experts in a variety of fields, such as health care policy, financing and organization that are visiting the community and offering input about the health care initiative that’s designed to create America’s Healthiest Hometown. The scholars program was made possible through a dedicated gift to USF Health to bring together this panel of experts.

By **LARRY D. CROOM** / DAILY SUN OMBUDSMAN

THE VILLAGES

Dr. David Meltzer summed up the efforts to change health care in Florida’s Friendliest Hometown with two simple words – “incredibly exciting.”

Meltzer, a physician, researcher and Chief of the Section of Hospital Medicine at the University of Chicago, said that while the health care system across the United States faces a variety of challenges, the initiative here seems quite promising.

“I think that the way they’re really trying to find ways to care for the whole population is wonderful,” he said. “The strengthening of primary care and the incorporation of specialty care into a network supported by primary care is just spectacular.”

Meltzer, a graduate of the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine who also earned a Ph.D. in economics from the university, said he enjoyed touring several Villages Health primary care centers during his recent visit here.

“They’re really thoughtfully organized, and the way in which teams are brought together to care for the patient is wonderful,” he said. “And the opportunities to educate patients and engage them in their own care are great.”

All Villages Health primary care centers are patient-centered medical homes, meaning they operate under strict guidelines and are recognized as such by the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

Meltzer said the concept is talked about by a lot of primary care practices, but not every operation has the commitment or the facilities to make it happen.

“I think the idea of organizing care around the patient is a wonderful idea, and primary care is a very important part of that,” he said. “Nationally, there’s a lot of hope that the patient-centered medical home will achieve a lot of goals – that it will make care better and it will also lower the cost of care.”

Meltzer said he’s convinced the patient-centered medical home concept will improve care, but he said controlling costs is the difficult part.

“I think the challenge is going to be making sure that each person gets the right care that they need,” he said. “What that means is that some people will need a lot of care and very intensive care, and other people will need less. The trick in controlling cost is going to be making sure that we spend the money where it’s really going

to make a difference and don’t spend the money where it’s not going to make a difference. I think the system they’re setting up here is well-suited to be able to do that.”

Meltzer, who received his bachelor of science degree from Yale, said there’s plenty of evidence that shows the importance of a solid doctor-patient relationship.

“We know that Medicare patients who are cared for by the same doctor for 15 years or more have lower costs of care in the later years of their life,” he said. “Similarly, patients with lung cancer in their terminal hospitalization are much less likely to spend time in the intensive care unit when the care during that hospitalization is provided by their primary care doctor.”

Meltzer said a study a few years ago among Veterans Affairs patients showed similar findings when some were assigned to see the same doctor at every visit while others were always treated by a different physician.

“The ones who got care from the same doctor had amazingly better outcomes,” he said. “I think people know the difference. They know when a doctor understands them and they feel more comfortable with the trust and the relationship that they have.”

Meltzer said he believes the strong connection between The Villages Health and an academic partner like USF Health is necessary for the initiative to be successful and for others to learn from it.

“I think there are great opportunities here for innovations and to study those innovations and to disseminate them,” he said. “I look forward to the lessons that will come from those studies.”

Dr. Elliot Sussman, chair of The Villages Health, said he’s thrilled to have Meltzer onboard as a scholar because of his background in both

The Dr. David Meltzer file

Currently: physician, researcher, chief of the Section of Hospital Medicine University of Chicago

Age: 49

Education:

Doctor of Medicine (University of Chicago, Pritzker School of Medicine, 1993)

Diplomat (National Board of Medical Examiners, 1994)

Diplomat (American Board of Internal Medicine, 1996)

Doctorate (University of Chicago, Department of Economics, 1992)

Undergraduate degree, molecular biophysics and biochemistry economics (Yale College, 1986)

economics and medicine. “What David brought was his training as an economist and particularly a labor economist,” Sussman said. “If you think about the issues in health care, we all know that money matters. And in many ways, the study of economics is the study of resources.”

Sussman added that Meltzer’s background as a primary care physician also was crucial.

“He’s done interesting things in ambulatory practice, as well as in hospitalist practice,” Sussman said. “So he has a whole set of experiences and accumulated wisdom that we could make use of.”