

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. Stephen Fischer, a primary care physician at the Belleview Care Center, lists “Star Trek” as his all-time favorite television show.

Fixing health care: All about Dr. Lori Wemlinger

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.

What is your favorite part about being a physician?

I enjoy talking to people and helping to solve problems. I like to get to the meat of the problem and try to help them solve it.

Why did you choose primary care?

Because I’m kind of a generalist. I like to do a little bit of this and a little bit of that and I think I couldn’t really just concentrate on one area. So I picked an area that I could see a multitude of problems and concerns.

What is your philosophy on health care?

My general nature is just being honest and down to earth with patients and trying to listen to them and to recognize that they’re individuals and try not to put them in a group with everybody else. Everybody’s a little bit different and there’s certain ways you treat certain diseases but not everybody fits that mold, so I try to individualize it to that patient and try to work with them on a personal basis. I think most people appreciate when I try to look at them as unique individuals with unique problems rather than trying to say, ‘well, you have this or this is what you’ve got to do and that’s the end of the story.’ A lot of patients want it done a certain way. They don’t want to take certain medicines and so on and so forth. So I try to individualize it and try to help them solve their problem in a unique way.

What is it like to treat patients who are so active and into their health?

I think that’s great. Some of these people are more active than I would ever be. I think I’m in pretty good shape and these people are biking and running and swimming six days a week, sometimes seven. This one guy was playing softball seven days and water volleyball. There’s amazingly fit people in the community.

What is the one thing you like the most about your job?

I like people, so I could spend all day just talking to



Care Center:
Santa Barbara
Age: 58
Undergraduate:
University of Illinois
Medical school:
Southern Illinois University School of Medicine
Residency:
Southern Illinois University School of Medicine
Affiliated Hospitals:
Board certified:
American Board of Internal Medicine

people and hearing their stories. And making them feel better and of course, solving their problems. I really enjoy that part of my role as a doctor.

Please talk about the importance of seeing a primary care doctor before picking a specialist on your own.

I think you really need to address all your problems with your primary care (doctor) and things that they cannot address or help you with, then they can tell you where’s appropriate. Sometimes when you just pick one out of the hat, it may not be the problem you need to be addressing in the first place. Just because you have belly pain, it might not be your belly. It might be your heart or some other condition and sometimes when you just go to specialists, they address their area and they don’t really look at the whole picture. So you may continue to have problems and continue to seek specialists until you finally get to a primary care (doctor) that can kind of weave it all together.

Next week Find out all about Dr. James Mersey, an endocrinologist who practices at the USF Health Specialty Care Center.

Becoming America’s Healthiest Hometown The importance of patient-centered care

“Doctors need to spend time with patients. They need to know the patient’s concerns and gain their trust. They need to engage the patients with a medical plan that will accomplish and achieve goals set by the patient and physician.”

Dr. Helene Aisenstat,
Pinellas Care Center



The Villages



George Horsford / Daily Sun

Dr. Dave Jordahl, right, spends time talking with one of his first patients, Village of Sanibel resident Edward Stafford. Jordahl, medical director of Colony Care Center, is one of the physicians with a full panel who is now spending time getting to know each one of his patients well.

Limiting patient count

Doctors with full panels looking forward to providing excellent care

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

WHEN THE Villages Health was formed, the main goal was to create a system that was completely patient-centered.

That meant that the physician – a 21st-century Marcus Welby – and his team of medical professionals would work alongside the patient to make sure that every decision was based on that patient’s needs.

To achieve that goal, Villages Health officials knew they’d have to limit the number of patients each physician would be responsible for. That meant that the traditional model of between 2,000 and 3,000 patients was simply out of the question. That number, Villages Health officials decided, should be much less – 1,250 – to allow primary care doctors the opportunity to really get to know their patients and provide excellent treatment for them.

“Doctors can’t do that when they have thousands of patients and they’re churning each one through,” said Dr. Elliot Sussman, chair of The Villages Health. “That only happens with literally the gift of time.”

Sussman said that cherished gift of time can only come with limited patient panels. And not surprisingly, now that The Villages Health has been in operation for more than a year, some doctors are starting to see their patient list become complete. And while that means certain physicians won’t take new patients, Sussman said, there are other doctors still available and Villages Health officials will do their best to pair patients with the right doctors.

“We’ll ask them what’s important for them to have in a doctor and what it is that they value,” he said. “Then we’ll work with them to find somebody who fits those needs.”

Sussman said he knows some patients will inevitably ask if a doctor with a full panel can take just one or two more patients. The answer to that question, he said, simply has to be “no.”

“If it was really just one or two more, of course,” he said, adding that more than 11,000 Villagers have chosen The Villages Health in the past year. “But it’s never just one or two more. And if you do it for one, then why wouldn’t you do it for others. And if

that happens, then suddenly we’re right back in the really dysfunctional, poorly working health system that the majority of people experience. So as they fill up, we will close those panels. It’s the responsible thing to do for the current patients who’ve selected those physicians.”

Dr. Dave Jordahl, medical director of Colony Care Center, is one of those physicians who has a full panel. Jordahl joined The Villages Health team a few months before the Colony Care Center opened in December 2012 and he said he’s spent the past year getting to know his patients quite well.

“That was the thing that was hard for me when I was coming down here was to leave an 11-year practice where I knew everybody really well,” he said. “Now I’m seeing that again and it’s extremely rewarding for me and I’m assuming rewarding for my patients to see a familiar face every time I walk into the room.”

Jordahl added that having a limited panel is a huge benefit for patients and a plus for him as well.

“I feel like I’m making a difference,” he said. “I’m not just

treading water and putting out fires and dealing with those things that are just up front, but actually looking beyond and preventing diseases from even happening.”

Dr. Karla Noel, medical director of the new Pinellas facility, said she’s enjoying the opportunity to get to know all of her patients.

“I feel blessed that my panel was filled and completed as fast as it was,” she said. “I do look forward to getting to know my patients as we both go through different life events, developing relationships together and striving for us both to be the healthiest people we can be.”

Dr. Michael Clifford, a physician at Colony Care Center with a full panel, agreed.

“I’m going to do everything that I can to give them the quality of care that I think is appropriate for them and to be attentive to their needs,” he said of his patients. “The biggest thing you can offer a person, as far as I’m concerned in medicine, is listening, so that they feel heard. The biggest thing is that they feel that they are your No. 1 patient. That is very reassuring for individuals and that can be very therapeutic in its own right.”

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
The Villages Health Mulberry Grove Care Center
8877 S.E. 165th Mulberry Lane (Opening spring 2014)

Specialty care

USF Health Specialty Care Center
1400 N. U.S. Highway 24/441, Building 810

The Villages Health Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center
1050 Old Camp Road, Building 100 (Opening spring 2014)

Medicare resources

To learn about Medicare, visit a UnitedHealthcare MedicareStore in The Villages.

Lake Sumter Landing
1049 Lake Sumter Landing
391-5262

Spanish Springs
979 Del Mar Drive
674-7160

Brownwood
2617 W. Torch Lake Drive
674-1240

La Plaza Grande
1124 Bichara Blvd.
460-7924

Information is also available at:

■ medicaremadeclear.com
■ medicare.gov

■ 1-800-Medicare
■ SHINE 1-800-963-5337

■ Send an email to information@elderaffairs.org.