

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?

Beverly Dorson, a physician assistant at the Colony Care Center, is a big fan of two of actor Tom Hanks' movies, the 1994 hit "Forrest Gump" and the 1999 drama "The Green Mile."

Doctor Q&A

Do physician extenders go through a rigorous educational and training process before they are certified to practice?

There is an extensive training period, schooling, clinical training and an examination, certification process, much along the same lines of physicians. Obviously,



it's not exactly alike in terms of the length of schooling and all that. But it's a difficult program to get into, to become a physician assistant or nurse practitioner. You go through a very robust clinical training program, rotating at different places, learning different facets of medicine. I will say that when we select our extenders it's a very rigorous interview process, just like it is with our doctors.

Dr. Robert Reilly,
medical director,
Lake Sumter Creekside
Care Center

First of all, the prerequisites to get into any kind of extender school, whether it's physician assistant or nurse practitioner, are extensive. They have to have a big background in science and math. A lot of these extenders have previous experience in



medicine, like paramedic school or nurses. They have experience before they ever get there. Otherwise, they would never be allowed to go into the school. It's pretty competitive to get in.

Dr. Christine Stopyra,
Lake Sumter Creekside
Care Center

Most of them have medical backgrounds, be it either as nurses or physical therapists. Or else they usually have some degree and experience in health care delivery and they've wanted to extend their capacity to deliver health



care. They go through a very rigorous program to become physician extenders. When they come in, they're usually very competent, very well trained. They're capable of doing many, many things very well. And if they work well with a physician that they're assigned to, it becomes an extension – basically an extension of who you are. There's no drop-off in the quality of care that's delivered.

Dr. Saul Rosenblum,
medical director,
Santa Barbara Care Center

Do you ever learn things from your physician extenders?

I learn from these people all the time. Having all this interaction is very helpful in keeping us up on things. You can't walk around



here not knowing what you're doing, because everybody's going to know that you don't know what you're doing. We have so much interaction between the different doctors and the physician assistants and the nurse practitioners that you really do stay up on the medical world. If you don't know something, you sort of have to go back and look it up and make sure you do know it the next time.

Dr. Brooks Betts,
Colony Care Center



Shira Small-Cangialosi, left, a physician assistant at the Santa Barbara Care Center, looks over a patient's file recently in a visit room with medical assistant Nicole Schmidt.

Photos by George Horsford / Daily Sun

Perfect partnership

Villages Health doctors say physician extenders play vital role

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

Doctors at The Villages Health have many advantages when it comes to providing excellent care for patients, but they all agree that one of their best resources is the physician extenders who work alongside them on a daily basis.

"I think we're all on the same page in regards to how we want to treat our patients, and physician extenders are needed because the doctor is not always physically able to be with a patient," said Dr. Aya Olejeme, of the Belleview Care Center, when speaking about the physician assistants and nurse practitioners at The Villages Health. "So I feel that having a good relationship with our extenders and those extenders talking to our patients is critical for continuity of care."

Dr. J. Stephen Long, of the Colony Care Center, said he has worked with physician extenders in the past and can't imagine providing treatment without them.

"They really can be worth their weight in gold," he said. "We tend to use our extenders a lot for ill visits and things that pop up suddenly, and that helps to assure our patients get seen very promptly."

Long, who works closely with Beverly Dorson, a physician assistant, said he appreciates the back-and-forth conversations he has with her throughout the day.

"I've found that our extenders here are very much

interested in discussing the cases with the physicians who normally see the patient," he said. "Beverly will come over to me before the day starts, and any people that raise red flags of concern, we share some notes and talk about what issues may be going on before she goes in to see the patient. And if she comes out and has any kind of concern about what's going on with somebody, she tracks me down and we go over it."

Dr. Robert Aisenstat, a physician at the Pinellas Care Center, said he and his nurse practitioner, India Dillion, also are constantly communicating throughout the day.

"She sits 3 feet from me, so she just spins around in the chair and talks to me about the patients," he said. "It may be very informal, very subtle on appearance purposes. But I'm answering her questions, sitting right there with her. The bottom line is I'm still responsible for that patient."

Dr. Stephen Fischer, of the Belleview Care Center, said that kind of interaction is quite common and often provides great learning opportunities.

"Part of making them better and empowering them is to kind of say, 'Well, what



Riddhi Patel, a physician assistant at the Santa Barbara Care Center, left, demonstrates how to conduct an examination with Charlene Chapman, of the Village Rio Grande.

Coming July 20

New USF Health leader touts partnership, calls The Villages a "dream" environment.

would you do? What do you think is the right thing to do?" said Fischer, who works closely with Susan Bonenclark, a physician assistant. "Most of the time, they're right. But if the answer is not quite what I would do, you take that opportunity to teach them. So the next time that comes along, they're much more comfortable taking care of it."

Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director of the Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center, said his communication with his physician assistant, Karen Doyle, is very similar.

"I probably talk to my extender more than my spouse," he said with a chuckle. "She's sitting right next to

me all day. We are talking to each other even when I'm off-site. She's sending me text messages about patients. Karen knows what I would want to do before she even enters the room with a patient."

Dr. Joe Hildner, chief medical officer of The Villages Health, said that kind of close relationship between physicians and extenders is exactly how it's supposed to work. And, he added, patients should always feel like they're seeing their physician, even if the extender is the only one in the room with them.

"That extender may crack his own jokes, and use his own analogies when he's explaining things, but he's doing what I would do if I were there," he said. "So the kind of understanding that a physician and an extender often have is, 'Do what I would do, don't do what I wouldn't do, and if you're not sure, come ask me.'"

Notable quotes

"The beauty of it is that I can have multiple extenders in different rooms evaluating patients, doing all the legwork for me. Either they can discuss it with me when I come out of my room with my patient or actually grab hold of me to actually visit the patient."



Dr. Robert Aisenstat,
Pinellas Care Center

"It's a constant education process. We doctors talk to each other. We educate ourselves. We ask each other, 'You know, I'm not sure. I don't see many people who have this. What would you do in this case?' or 'What should I do?' So we help each other, and extenders are the same."



Dr. Stephen Fischer,
Belleview Care Center

"They come to the table with different life experiences. I worked in Sears before going into medical school, so I was able to better orient myself with customers. We have different providers who do mission work – just all of those other social interactions that you have with people across human nature. It helps to build on who we are, and that applies to the extenders as well. It just adds all kinds of extra knowledge base and seeing things from a different angle."



Dr. Karla Noel,
medical director,
Pinellas Care Center

"Our reading of the patients is that they want to know that they have a personal physician that's theirs. And they respect that that physician needs help and doesn't have to be touching every little thing that happens. But they still want to know that if another member of the team is part of the care, that care is still under the blessing and the overall leadership and tutelage of their personal physician. That's the model that we work within."



Dr. Joe Hildner,
chief medical officer,
The Villages Health