

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.

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Did you know?

Marykate Drake, a physician assistant at the Pinellas Care Center, is the proud aunt of 14 nieces and nephews.

Doctor Q&A

Why are physician extenders so important to a practice like The Villages Health?



They help, especially when a patient is in need of immediate care and the doctor might be busy or might be out of the office. That's when you put your trust in your physician extender to help take care of that situation.

Dr. Mariel Gonzalez Mendoza,
Pinellas Care Center



I've worked with extenders since I was a resident. We had nurse practitioners at my residency program and it just makes sense. You've got somebody who is skilled, somebody that you supervise that knows the patients, knows the situation and knows the doctor. It doesn't get any better than that.

Dr. Paul Daluga,
Mulberry Grove Care Center



We work as a team and are involved in knowing our patients and knowing what's happening. So, in case I'm not able to see my patients, they know my patient. They don't have to start from the beginning and try to find out what's happening. That makes it easier for them to take care of patients and it gives patients a better satisfaction with respect to the care that they are getting.

Dr. Nasseer Masoodi,
Santa Barbara Care Center



They give us the opportunity to see more people, to see them faster and get them in the same day. They give good care and they kind of work under us. They're that close to us and they learn from working with us kind of what we would do and how we would do it. So they really are extenders of us. They're an extra set of hands.

Dr. Stephen Fischer,
Bellevue Care Center



It enables people who have acute problems to have those taken care of right away, instead of having to wait three days and suffer maybe some bad consequences. So, an extender is exactly as the word implies. It's me extended a little bit further so that proper attention can be given.

Dr. Michael Wald,
Mulberry Grove Care Center



We can't be in all places at all times. Therefore, having an extender is us reaching out through another body and through another voice. They're trained very well in most medical issues. Our extenders are family-practice or primary-care trained. So it's not like they have a surgical background. They're actually trained to do the same things we do."

Dr. Robert Aisenstat,
Pinellas Care Center



Conni Henderson, left, a licensed practical nurse, consults recently with Dr. Saul Rosenblum and nurse practitioner Sylvia Wallace in the huddle zone of the Santa Barbara Center.

Photos by George Horsford / Daily Sun

Extending the reach

Physician assistants, nurse practitioners key to providing patient access

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

When it comes to seeing patients at The Villages Health, there's no doubt that timely visits are a priority.

Access is a crucial part of being a patient-centered medical home, which means that patients must be seen, even when physicians are tied up and unavailable.

And that, Villages Health officials point out, is where the physician extender plays such an important role.

"A thing we hear all the time about health care today is that if you call your doctor on a Monday morning with a killer migraine, they say, 'We'll see you a week from Friday,'" said Dr. Joe Hildner, chief medical officer of The Villages Health. "That's just not OK. We need to see people when they need to be seen. And for focused issues – I've got sinusitis, I've got a rash, I think I broke my toe – things like that are really very appropriately managed through the involvement of the extender."

Dr. Elliot Sussman, chair of The Villages Health, said physician extenders – physician assistants or nurse practitioners – are key members of the team when it comes to providing excellent and timely care.

"There's no question that the quarterback of the team is the primary care physician," he said. "But there are things that a physician is very good at and there are other things

that that physician may not have as much training in as a physician extender – those unique skills in terms of how they reach a patient, cause them to change a behavior or cause them to be engaged with their health in an on-going way."

Sussman said one of the biggest benefits is that extenders literally "extend" the physician's reach with his or her patients.

"They're able to work side by side, with the physician, doing a variety of procedures, doing a variety of different parts of the physical exam, coming up with a series of impressions, sharing those with the physician and getting a patient the right care at the right time," he said. "So there's no question that the physician extender really is someone who, as a critical part of the team, makes it better for the patient overall."

Dr. Saul Rosenblum, medical director of the Santa Barbara Care Center, said he



Physician assistant Karen Doyle, left, talks about a patient's file recently with Valerie Crenshaw, a certified medical assistant, at the Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center.

Coming July 13
Villages Health doctors say role physician extenders play is vital.

truly appreciates being able to provide additional care through the use of extenders.

"It becomes a dance, in terms of kind of an occupational dance," he said. "They know what we would do in certain situations. We know what they're capable of, and they are extremely well trained."

"And some of the patients get to think of them as their personal health care deliverers. It's a wonderful ability to kind of extend the team of health care delivery for patients."

Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director of the Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center, said there's no doubt primary care doctors would struggle

mightily without extenders.

"You're rendering care, and while you're doing that in one visit room your extender is doing that in an adjacent visit room with one of your other patients," he said. "You can't be in two rooms at one time, but in essence you kind of are because the extender is there, acting as you if you were in that room."

Dr. J.D. Steed, medical director of the Bellevue Care Center, agreed.

"You're just kind of picked together in the same juice and the same thinking that goes along with that," he said. "So when we have an extender that knows the patient, we play it so that the first one that can get to that complaint or help that person out, go ahead and help them out. Then if they recognize it's too complicated, they're going to step back and say, 'You really need to help here.' They are a great front-line resource to have by our side."

Notable quotes



"I think patients should feel comfortable seeing physician extenders. It begins with relationships, and core to us is the relationship that a patient has with a physician. Hopefully, that patient recognizes that in order to provide care in this community that's most current, most up-to-date and most effective, we need a team-based approach. At times, there may be a visit that only involves one member of the team. And that may be a physician extender."

Dr. Elliot Sussman,
chair, The Villages Health



"Physician extenders are trained to know their limits and to know when to ask for help. That's a real key for anybody, is to know when you need help. So they do help to free up our time so that we have more time to see other patients."

Dr. Daniel Whinnen,
Bellevue Care Center



"My physician extender's acumen is fantastic. I can tell that her breadth of experience is fantastic. She is fabulous and I would trust her with any member of my family, any day of the week."

Dr. Christine Stopyra,
Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center, talking about her physician extender, Shira Small-Cangialosi



"I have worked with nurse practitioners and physician assistants in the past where they weren't utilized in the capacity that they really should be utilized in. They weren't allowed or able to use their abilities. But here, I think they can truly be used to their fullest ability and can really be an asset to this practice."

Dr. Brooks Betts,
Colony Care Center



"If you've been coming to me for years and we know each other really well but today I'm asking if you'd be willing to see my extender, you should sense that you're still getting my care through that extender."

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