

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?

Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center Manager Sheri Harwood has a unique hobby – baking specialty cupcakes.

Extender Q-and-A

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

I think the importance of a physician extender is to fill the gap that there is in health care regarding just patient education, patient care and being an extension of the physician when they can’t always see those



urgent (patients) right away because their schedules are so booked up. And just being able to provide as much care as possible to as many people as possible without them having to wait around for months at a time.

Riddhi Patel,
physician assistant,
Santa Barbara Care Center

What is the real advantage of physician extenders being able to handle acute issues?

Let’s take that patient who wakes up with a headache and wants to be seen today. Hopefully, it’s just that it’s a headache and it goes away just as quickly as it came up. But let’s say that it’s not just a headache. It’s the beginning



of an aneurysm, and you’re told that you have to wait three days for an appointment. Obviously, that’s not good. The patients who are really sick and in need of a physician get that care, right then and there.

Susan Bonenclark,
physician assistant,
Belleview Care Center

What took you from being a clinical psychologist to being a physician assistant?

It was, for me, a natural professional evolution because it put it all together. Consideration of the whole person, down to the cellular level, but very much brain-



based in my thinking about disease, because there’s many correlates of diseases that stem from psychological disorders.

Cynthia Stewart,
physician assistant, Mulberry
Grove Care Center

How does your background as a former paramedic come into play with patient care?

When emergencies arise, I tend to stay a little calmer than some other people. I don’t have a problem calling the paramedics when I need them, because I know what they can do and what we may not be capable of doing here, just for lack of equipment or whatnot. It’s just that



experience of working with people and knowing what a person’s body is capable of helps. People tend to get a little nervous over things that if you’re experienced, you know it’s going to be OK. So, we can calm the patients. As a paramedic, you have to be able to calm patients, because oftentimes you have critical things going on. You just need to keep everything smooth.

Karen Doyle,
physician assistant,
Lake Sumter Creekside
Care Center



Photos by George Horsford / Daily Sun

Physician assistant Karen Doyle, left, talks about a patient’s file recently with Valerie Crenshaw, a certified medical assistant, in the huddle zone area of the Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center.

Key communications

Villages Health doctors, physician extenders constantly talking about patients

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

Physician extenders who work alongside Villages Health doctors say a huge part of their success is the communication that is shared back and forth throughout the day.

Those extenders – nurse practitioners and physician assistants – provide access for patients who might have acute issues, as well as the ability to gather key information and confer with their physicians before appointments. And they also help educate patients about various conditions and help motivate them to make needed lifestyle changes.

But none of that happens without one key element – constant interaction with the attending physician, which oftentimes happens in the “huddle zones” where members of the medical teams work side by side.

For David Fischer, a physician assistant at the Colony Care Center who also is working at The Villages Health Specialty Care Center, that valuable communication often takes place with Dr. Dave Jordahl, medical director of the Colony facility.

“We’re constantly talking about our patients – people that I’ve seen, people that he’s seen, people that are going to be coming back to see me and vice versa,” Fischer said. “But they are his patients. We are not there to take over the care. We are working with him to provide good care. And hopefully patients feel like when they leave here that they received good care from me, but through him, and vice versa.”

Susan Bonenclark, a

Coming Sept. 7

UnitedHealthcare is bringing National Medicare Education Week back to Florida’s Friendliest Hometown.

Dr. Smita Ojha, of the Lake Sumter Creekside Care Center, offers her thoughts on being a part of The Villages Health.

physician assistant at the Belleview Care Center who works closely with Dr. Stephen Fischer and Dr. Aya Olejeme, said that communication is essential for excellent medical care to occur.

“Every note that I write, that physician sees,” she said. “So if he wasn’t standing right there by my side while I saw the patient, they’re reviewing my notes. I get constant feedback and there’s constant input on the patient’s care.”

“And it’s not one or the



Dr. Robert Reilly, left, consults with Debby Brown, a certified medical assistant, at the Colony Care Center.

other. It’s not that you see the doctor or the extender, because the physician always has input on the care.”

For Karen Doyle, the communication with her physician, Dr. Robert Reilly, is one of her favorite aspects of the job.

“If he’s looking at labs and I haven’t seen them already, he’ll jot me a text message like, ‘So-and-so’s coming in next week and I’ve seen her labs. We want to do this or that. Or take care of this and look for that,’” said Doyle, who is a physician assistant. “It’s just an easy way to work. And I like having a doctor that I can go up to and get some more information.”

Jamie Kinsey, a physician assistant who works with Dr. J.D. Steed at the Belleview Care Center, agreed.

“We sit right next to each other, and a lot of times I say to him, ‘Dr. Steed, I wanted to run this by you,’ or ‘I just wanted you to be aware,’” she said. “He reviews my charts, so he reads everything that happens with his patients through me.”

Caroline Mathis, a nurse practitioner in women’s health at The Villages Health Specialty Care Center, said she also works quite closely with her physician, OB-GYN Kathleen Steepy.

“If I’m seeing a patient that may need to see Dr. Steepy, I kind of prepare her, ‘OK, I need you to fill out this form,’ so it gives her a better idea of what’s going on, or ‘I need you to fill out this,’ because it allows her to be able to extend the care that we’ve done,” Mathis said. “But it’s not like she does this and I do that. We all just work together.”

For Jennifer Jordahl, a nurse practitioner at the Specialty Care Center, it’s a system that truly makes sense.

“There are lots of opportunities to make sure that we’re able to meet with our precepting physician and they encourage it,” she said. “The doctors that have been hired here are all about having a team approach. So it just works very smoothly, and the patients are the ones that benefit from that.”

Notable quotes

“If a patient calls in on Monday morning and they’re sick, they don’t want to hear, ‘We’ll see you a week from Wednesday.’ They want to know what time today they can be seen. I think that’s basically one of the main purposes that we serve is just improving access to patient care. That’s very important. When you feel really bad, you want to be taken care of. That’s what we’re here for.”



Sue Schueler,
nurse practitioner,
Pinellas Care Center

“We extend the physician’s ability to see the patients. Only so many people can be seen in one day and usually, there’s more than that that need to be seen in a day. So there’s some things that the patients absolutely need to see the doctor for and some things that they don’t. We do a lot of those things that they don’t need the doctor for.”



Karen Doyle,
physician assistant,
Lake Sumter Creekside
Care Center

“I feel like the patients, for the most part, are pleased to see an extender. Having an extender offers same-day appointments and I think patients really like that. They call in in the morning and say, ‘Hey, I woke up with this problem.’ And our staff says, ‘We can get you in to see Jamie or Brittany or whomever at this time.’ It’s the same day and they say, ‘Wow. Sure. I’ll see them.’”



Jamie Kinsey,
physician assistant,
Belleview Care Center

“We’re part of the team. We’re in the same huddle. We get to know what each other does and how they do it and why. That’s my job, to extend the physician, extend the physician’s thoughts, extend what the physician would do. Not what I would necessarily do, but what that physician would do.”



Marykate Drake,
physician assistant,
Pinellas Care Center

“We see a lot of acute patients, so patients that are coming in for sore throat, congestion, had a fall, something like that, they’re very appreciative that we can see them the same day. A lot of doctor’s offices can’t accommodate that. We’re able to accommodate that because there are so many extenders able to see those patients.”



Riddhi Patel,
physician assistant,
Santa Barbara Care Center

“This is a very rare opportunity and an exciting opportunity as well. There’s really not many places like this where extenders have such great relationships with the physicians. I was very lucky to find a place like this and also to have the philosophy of why The Villages Health was created and having a patient-centered medical home. That’s why I came.”



Brittany Gagnon,
physician assistant,
Belleview Care Center