

from the front page

WHERE THE DOCTORS ARE
A DAILY SUN SPECIAL REPORT

HEALTH JOBS

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industrial organizational psychologists.

The top five occupations with the largest volume of job growth are projected to be health-related as well. Personal care and home health aides, medical secretaries and assistants, and licensed practical and vocational nurses all are expected to experience explosive growth by 2022, the data showed.

“I believe strongly in independence,” Melinsky said. “We all wonder, ‘Will other people really care for us?’”

When she’s not exercising, she relaxes on her lanai and listens to birds.

“It really is a personal decision everyone needs to consider,” Melinsky said. “I certainly would like to live in my own house.”

It’s a priority reflected in the proposed 2016 presidential budget.

The budget requests that \$10 million be allotted to expand on service coordinators and housing, with the goal of providing housing to even low-income elderly households and allow seniors to age in place and access human services.

“Healthy aging takes place in communities where older adults can be active, find affordable and appropriate housing and access needed health and social services,” said Nora Super, executive director of the White House Conference on Aging, in an April 2 WHCOA blog post.

It’s a trend home health agencies in The Villages are addressing, said Melody Bentley, registered nurse and director of Better @ Home home health agency.

“No one wants to leave their home,” she said. “It’s more familiar, and you’re not somewhere with other people sharing sicknesses. At the end of the day, we all want to be home.”

Home health aides and nurses work in conjunction with physicians to keep a balance between autonomy and adequate care, Bentley said.

“We teach a lot of people skills like wound care or medication management,” she said. “We are there to teach the patient how to be capable and maintain their disease.”

Both physical and speech therapy reinforce independence in patients, Bentley said.

“The goal is to have patients age in place,” she said.

Patient independence is, indeed, fueling the field of health care, said Dr. Laurence Solberg, professor of geriatric medicine at the University of Florida.

“We’ve created a program specifically to address the needs of an aging population,” he said. “Home health aides and physical therapists are gaining in popularity. Many studies find that mobility and exercise are some of the most important things to seniors.”

People 65 and older want to stay in their homes as long as possible, but they will need help, Solberg said.

“They’ll need some kind of assistance,” he said. “Typically that would be bathing, meal preparation and just daily activities.”

His department is preparing faculty and medical students to better understand the growing field of geriatrics, Solberg said.

“Communication between medical professionals can be an issue, along with too many medications,” Solberg said. “We need to learn to listen to the patient and manage the care as they want to manage it, as much as we possibly can.”

One of the big factors in changes to the way health care is delivered is the rise of chronic diseases, Solberg said.

“We are seeing more and more chronic illnesses as people live longer,” he said. “The management of these

cases is closely watched.”

Chronic disease accounts for 70 percent of the deaths in the U.S. and about 75 percent of total health-care costs, Elsevier Health Sciences found in a recent study.

About 92 percent of the 65 and older population suffers from a chronic disease.

By 2020, it is estimated that 48 percent of the total population will have a chronic disease, the study also found.

It’s not uncommon to see a patient with more than five unique and oftentimes complex conditions, said Dr. Robert Reilly, medical director for The Villages Health’s Creekside Care Center.

“This creates a challenge for physicians and a new paradigm in the care of the patients,” he said. “Patients in the ‘Information Age’ are routinely well-read. Clinicians will face expectations from their patients in terms of diagnostic evaluation and treatment options and, whether reasonable or not, will need to address these expectations while attempting to provide the best care possible.”

Patients are becoming increasingly involved in the research of care options, he added.

“They are active participants who want to make informed decisions,” Reilly said.

This makes anticipating the next shift in health care no easy task.

“You try to pay attention to what is happening at the local and federal government level,” he said. “You stay abreast of the newest evidence-based guidelines being published in your particular field and anticipate what might be coming next down the pipeline.”

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HEALTH CARE

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of working in an innovative primary care environment.

Here, physicians experience smaller patient loads, longer visits with patients, 40-hour work weeks and a competitive salary that is not tied to volume of care.

“They’ll see that providing ongoing, meaningful relationships with their patient panel can be rewarding – in fact, more rewarding than a very narrow look at specialty care,” Sussman said. “That could be the future of medicine.”

That formula could help turn the tide in career choice toward primary care, said Dr. Jeffrey Lowenkron, chief medical officer of The Villages Health.

“As they come through and experience it, what they recognize is folks who are genuinely happy with doing the work that they’re doing,” he said.

Dr. Laura Cloukey, the medical director at the Pinellas

Care Center who taught Harvard medical students at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, said she believes students can see primary care at its best in The Villages.

“I consider this an optimum environment for learning and for patient education,” she said. “The pace is such that physicians are able to spend enough time with the patient to actually teach the patient. That allows the medical student to see the best of what a physician can bring.”

That’s a much different experience than other practices can offer, she said.

“When you have primary care physicians seeing 25, 30 patients a day, you’re not seeing the best of those primary care doctors,” she said. “Here, I’ve been able to actually spend time and talk to a patient and educate them. I check in with them to make sure that they have full understanding of what I taught them and have them say it back to me in their

own words. If that’s not a valuable teaching moment for a medical student, I don’t know what is.”

Dr. Michael Wald, of the Mulberry Grove Care Center, said it’s also important for The Villages Health to have a reputation as a teaching facility.

His patients also appreciate that fact, he added.

“When I have the right patient, I’ll say, ‘I’m going to have my student take the history today and you and I are going to grade them,’” he said. “They enjoy it. I think it’s a positive from everybody’s aspect.”

Lowenkron agreed, adding that medical students training here will see a range of positives across the entire practice.

“You have solid colleagues, good support in the offices, wonderful facilities and a patient base that’s not just growing, but a patient base that’s recognizing what good care should look like,” he said. “So it’s really good to be a primary care doc here in The Villages.”

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