HELP for older patients

A stay in the hospital can be disorienting. Older patients are especially susceptible to the confusion that comes from being disconnected from routine activities and familiar faces. Patients who develop “hospital-acquired delirium” have longer lengths of stay, higher rates of readmission within 30 days, higher rates of falls, and greater rates of cognitive decline. Roughly 25% of patients over age 70 develop delirium while in the hospital.

Luckily, there is HELP.

Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP) is an innovative program designed to improve the hospital experience of older patients, and prevent disorientation and delirium. Northfield Hospital has been piloting its own program since July, using volunteers to engage with older patients in simple, social ways.

HELP has four main goals:

• Help patients maintain cognitive and physical functioning throughout hospitalization
• Allow patients to be discharged from the hospital as independent as possible
• Assist with the transition from hospital to the community
• Prevent unplanned readmission

Volunteers play a central role, carrying out program interventions directly at the bedside. Volunteers help with four specific interventions:

• Daily visits: communication and socialization to prevent mental confusion
• Feeding assistance: mealtime help, companionship
• Early mobilization: daily assistance with walking and exercise
• Therapeutic activities: Special activities to keep patients mentally stimulated during their stay

HELP serves 6-8 patients a month, with daily one-hour sessions. But that’s just a fraction of the patients who could benefit from the program – about 60-120 per month, says Louise Murray, Director of Acute Care and CCU at Northfield Hospital. To serve more patients, the hospital needs more volunteers (see “Want to HELP?” on page 6). The hospital will scale up the program as volunteers are added and trained, Murray says.

Volunteer Barb Schetnan sees a real benefit to the time she spends with patients.

“These interactions are simple, but they really help with someone’s health and recovery,” she says. “I’ve given backrubs, hand massages, combed people’s hair. Touch is a really big deal – it keeps people grounded. We do crossword puzzles, word search, sudoku – it brings them back to the present moment.”

Schetnan sometimes helps patients to eat; her past training as a nurse’s assistant comes in handy. But interactions are meant to be social, not medical.

“I ask questions about themselves and that gets patients talking,” Schetnan says. “Getting them to talk about their grandkids is easy! When people can talk about themselves, their family, something they’ve done, it keeps them in the moment.

Continued, page 6
Tips for better winter sleep

By Stacey Zell

As we prepare for winter hibernation over the coming months, one fact seems counter-intuitive: Long nights aren’t always restful nights.

Some aspects of winter can actually keep us awake, causing sleepless nights and drowsy days. Sleep deprivation – the lack of restful sleep – affects how well we function when we’re awake. Sleep deprivation can lead to memory impairment, poor job performance, and motor vehicle accidents.

Good winter sleep habits can help you get a better night’s sleep when the sun dips low and temperatures even lower.

Get more light. The decrease in light on short winter days can have a big effect on your quality of sleep. Light tells your brain that it’s time to wake up. And morning light helps regulate your biological clock and keep it on track. Try to get some light exposure every day. This may be as simple as taking off your sunglasses when you’re not driving. It’s best to expose yourself to bright light during the morning hours; your body clock is most responsive to sunlight between 6:00 and 8:30 a.m. Direct sunlight for at least 30 minutes – preferably outdoors – is best. Can’t get enough sunlight? Consider getting a light box; just 20-30 minutes per day can give your brain the light it craves. Many people are able to use a light box at home or on their desk at work.

Keep the thermostat low. Your body temperature naturally goes up slightly in the daytime and back down at night, reaching its low just before dawn. A drop in body temperature signals your body that it’s time to sleep. So, as tempting as it is to be warm and cozy, you’ll actually sleep better in a cooler room. When the air is too warm or dry, it saps the body’s mucus membranes and makes us uncomfortable – and more susceptible to illnesses like colds and the flu. Set your bedroom temperature to be cool and comfortable.

Get some exercise. Try to get physical exercise every day. During the dark cold days after work, it may seem easiest to head right home and hunker down. But research shows that exercise increases the quality of our sleep. Vigorous exercise in the late afternoon or evening may have the most benefit, because your body temperature drops lower than normal about four to five hours after your workout. (Don’t exercise right before bed; it stimulates your heart, muscles, and brain – just when you want them to relax.) Take the stairs during the day; if you can get outside, go for a brisk walk. For even more benefit, consider not wearing your sunglasses.

Change your eating habits. Winter can bring hearty dishes and a lot of carbohydrates to our meal-times. When you eat a heavy meal at night, your body has to work harder to digest the food, which may keep you up at night. Try to eat 4-5 hours before you intend to go to bed.

Manage the holidays. Many people sacrifice sleep to complete all of their holiday obligations – cooking, shopping, decorating, attending parties. Try to budget the extra time you need to do these holiday activities without cutting into your sleep time. At holiday parties, don’t have too much alcohol or caffeine, sugary foods, or fat-laden high-calorie foods. All of these can inhibit your normal sleep pattern.

Set a routine. Try to relax before going to sleep. It’s helpful to turn off your electronics an hour or two before going to bed. Create pre-sleep rituals to give your brain some time to calm down. A warm bath, some gentle yoga stretching, or a few minutes of reading may help you sleep better. Try to stick to a regular sleep/wake schedule. It may be tempting to sleep in on a cold winter morning on the weekend, or take a long nap in the afternoon. But altering your sleep too much on a Saturday or Sunday can reset your weekly sleep cycle, and cause trouble sleeping during the week ahead.

Sleep tight.

Stacey Zell is a respiratory therapist and coordinator of the Sleep Center at Northfield Hospital. Reach the Sleep Center at (507) 646-1099.
Mindful eating...changes everything

By Kristi Von Ruden

With winter upon us, eating habits start to change – whether we notice or not.

We make over 200 decisions about food on any given day, according to a study from Cornell University. But the study’s participants estimated that they make just 15 daily food decisions. Why? Because most of our decisions are made while on “mindless autopilot,” and are usually not based on what our bodies need. This leads to overeating, making unhealthy choices, and having negative feelings about food and ourselves... which leads to negative health effects overall.

Often when we think about food and health, we focus on diet and weight control. Mindful eating is a different perspective that helps us approach nutrition and wellness from a positive viewpoint.

Eating mindfully doesn’t mean we throw caution to the wind. Food is everywhere, and opportunities to eat are abundant in our culture – especially during the holidays.

At the same time, we are inundated with weight loss suggestions and quick-fix remedies to lose weight. These are generally about control and restriction.

Mindful eating instead helps us manage our eating with awareness. It helps to build a healthy relationship with food so we can enjoy eating, and make intentional, satisfying choices.

Eating mindfully helps us to honor the body and what it needs, and to accept the body as it is in the moment. A mindful eater knows that there is no right or wrong way to eat and does not experience guilt or shame after eating, because he or she is making conscious choices. This is why we begin our ReShape U! weight loss series with a class on mindful eating, and continue to integrate mindful eating throughout the 10-week program.

So, how can you begin to shift into eating more mindfully? Start by following the five steps shown here.

Mindfulness doesn’t happen overnight. Participants of the ReShape U! 10-week series often hear us say, “Be patient with yourself, and continue to practice.” The reward is a better relationship with food and the ability to make healthy choices and meet our health goals.

Bon appetit.

Kristi Von Ruden, RDN, LD, is a registered dietitian nutritionist coordinator at Northfield Hospital & Clinics.

Five steps to mindful eating

1) The next time you are going to make a food choice, ask yourself: “Am I hungry?”
2) If you’re not hungry, then ask: “Why am I eating?”
3) Remove distractions while eating. Savor every bite.
4) Use all of your senses when eating. How does your food smell? Are the colors bright or bland? Is there a satisfying sound – a crunch, or slurp? How does the food feel in your mouth?
5) Take your time. Savor the experience while enjoying your food and nourishing your body.

10-Week Weight Loss Series

Two Opportunities
Mondays, Jan. 11 - Mar. 14; 5:30-6:30 p.m.
Thursdays, Jan. 14 - Mar. 17; Noon-1 p.m.

ReShape U!

Weight Loss Support Group
Meets Wednesdays
Noon-1 p.m. or 5:30-6:30 p.m.

Nutrition Coaching
Individual 30-minute sessions.

All programs are led by a nutritionist. For information or to register, please call 507-646-1410.
As the OB/GYN staff continues to grow, one thing stays the same: All the doctors are women.

Two highly experienced OB/GYN physicians, Nicole Dohm-Palmer, MD and Kaye Mickelson, MD, have joined established physicians Dana Olson, MD and Deb Suppes, MD. These additions increase access to a wide range of OB/GYN health services for women of all ages at the Women’s Health Center in Northfield and FamilyHealth Medical Clinics in Lakeville and Farmington.

When the Women’s Health Center debuted in Northfield 10 years ago, it was unique to find an all-female OB/GYN group. Today this trend has caught on, for two reasons: More women physicians are entering the field, and more women seek women providers for their care.

Women are also taking a more active role in their health care, says Dr. Mickelson. Women want to work with their physicians to make decisions about diagnostic tests and treatment options. “Gone are the days when women go along with whatever their OB/GYN thinks should be done without asking questions,” Dr. Mickelson says. “This is a very positive development. Open communication and mutual respect lead to more individualized care. More individualized care leads to better outcomes, and everyone wins.”

Advancements in surgery

Recent surgical trends are towards minimally invasive procedures. “Hysterectomy is no longer the only option for treatment of many concerns,” such as abnormal uterine bleeding, Dr. Mickelson says. When hysterectomy is the best option, minimally-invasive hysterectomies offer less risk to the patient, less pain during recovery, and shorter interval until returning to normal activities.

“We’re doing laparoscopic hysterectomies almost exclusively,” says Dr. Dohm-Palmer. “Surgeries that use scopes or require smaller incisions cause less pain, reduce the need for blood transfusions, and tend to have fewer complications in general.”

Laparoscopic hysterectomy uses a laparoscope to guide the surgeon in removing the uterus or ovaries and fallopian tubes. The procedure is generally done via three small incisions in the abdomen, says Dr. Suppes. This surgery typically requires one overnight stay in the hospital and about two weeks of recovery – compared to two or three nights in the hospital and six weeks of recovery for a traditionally more invasive procedure.

“There’s still a role for abdominal hysterectomy in the case of a large uterus, or vaginal hysterectomy for significant prolapse,” Dr. Suppes adds.

Hysterectomy is an appropriate option to treat a number of conditions, including excessive menstrual bleeding, pelvic pain, uterine fibroids and endometriosis, says Dr. Suppes. These conditions typically affect women in their late 30s to early 50s.

New options for common conditions

In addition to advances in surgery, women have better choices to treat conditions like urinary incontinence and heavy menstrual bleeding.

Millions of women experience urinary incontinence. In fact, it’s twice as common in women as in men, according to the U.S Department of Health & Human Services. Pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause can all affect the urinary tract.

“Treatment for urinary incontinence is completely different than it was 15 years ago,” Dr. Dohm-Palmer says. In the past, OB/GYN surgeons relied on abdominal surgery to use the fascia, the strongest layer of the abdominal wall, to support the urethra.

“Now we can put in just a tiny mesh ribbon, which works as well as the abdominal fascial procedure without requiring abdominal surgery,” she says. It’s a same-day procedure, with a recovery time of 3 to 4 days – compared to six weeks of recovery for abdominal surgery.

There are other, non-surgical options too, such as physical therapy, Dr. Dohm-Palmer says.

Women with incontinence can be evaluated by any of the OB/GYNs, and discuss treatment options. For heavy menstrual bleeding, options include the use of an IUD (intrauterine device) or endometrial ablation, a procedure that eradicates the uterine lining, or endometrium, says Dr. Suppes.

Heavy bleeding (menorrhagia) is one of the most common problems women report to their doctors. It
A tradition of excellent care for women affects more than 10 million American women each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. This means that about one out of every five women has it.

“We can do endometrial ablations as an in-office procedure,” Dr. Dohm-Palmer says. “Patients like having the procedure done in the familiar environment of the clinic.” It can be a good option for patients who may have a high hospital co-pay but a smaller clinic co-pay.

Besides the development of minimally invasive surgical procedures, the single most exciting news on the horizon is that pharmaceutical companies are now developing medications to treat female sexual dysfunction, particularly decreased libido. “This issue affects an amazing number of patients and is difficult to treat because the female libido depends on so many different factors,” Dr. Mickelson says. “Although it’s unlikely there’s going to be a magical little blue pill to treat this concern, at least there will be some options.”

You’ve come a long way, baby

Obstetrics have advanced too, with patient-centered birth planning that respects the unique needs and wishes of each expectant mother. The OB/GYN providers and the First Touch Birth Center at Northfield Hospital foster family engagement before and after the birth. Childbirth preparation is available for all pregnant women and their partners. With queen-sized beds available in post-partum rooms, dads are invited to stay throughout the mother’s stay to learn how to bathe, feed and care for their new baby together. The physicians, OB nurses and support staff work together to create a friendly, safe place to have a baby.

No two women have exactly the same experience of traveling from puberty through menopause, but for most women it is easier to talk about the changes in their body with another woman who is also experiencing them. Women physicians and care providers offer authentic reassurances, which helps build trust.

Younger women, especially, prefer to see a female physician. “They feel that female doctors will be more empathetic to their issues,” says Dr. Dohm-Palmer. “Some patients like to see doctors who’ve had children too.”

Still, it takes more than empathy to provide excellent care. “I would love to say that an all-female group provides better care to patients because we listen and understand female concerns better,” Dr. Mickelson says. “The truth is that communication between physician and patient depends on personal interaction, and that in turn depends on the personalities involved. I can say that we have a great group of physicians here and that we are all 100% devoted to our patients.”
Dr. Fischer lauded as “Prevention Champion”

Jennifer Fischer, MD is on the front line of combatting opiate overdoses in Rice County. As an emergency room physician at Northfield Hospital, she knows how devastating opioid abuse can be.

To honor her work, Dr. Fischer was named a 2015 “Prevention Champion” by the Rice County Chemical Health Coalition, whose “Project Prevention” program seeks to reduce alcohol and drug abuse.

The coalition named six “Prevention Champions” this year. The annual award recognizes individuals who help reduce risk factors for alcohol and drug abuse, support recovery, or build assets for youth and other community members to foster a healthier life.

For Dr. Fischer, that means making Naloxone more available in the community to help combat opioid overdoses, including heroin.

Naloxone – also called “Narcan” – is an antidote to opioids; if given quickly after an overdose, it can keep patients breathing and prevent death.

“People die from an overdose because they stop breathing. Narcan reverses that, in just a few minutes,” Dr. Fischer says. (And if you give Narcan to someone who doesn’t need it, it won’t hurt them.)

But the effect wears off in 30 to 60 minutes. “If you don’t call 911 and stay with the person, they can overdose again without taking any additional drugs. That’s why calling 911 is so important.”

Dr. Fischer collaborates with the Steve Rummler Hope Foundation that championed “Steve’s Law,” which does three things: It allows physicians who write a prescription for Narcan for someone other than the end user (such as a parent, neighbor or friend of an opiate user); it lets first responders and private citizens administer Narcan in case of an overdose; and it protects people from prosecution for calling 911 and administering Narcan, as long as they stay with the victim.

This summer, Northfield Hospital & Clinics donated 24 doses of Naloxone to the Rice County Sheriff’s Department. “In rural areas, the sheriff’s department is often first on the scene and because time is crucial, it’s best for them to have Narcan on hand to administer immediately,” Dr. Fischer says. (The Hospital’s Emergency Medical Services carries Narcan in its ambulances; paramedics have administered it more than 50 times since 2010.)

Making Narcan more widely available and easier to use is just the first step, Dr. Fischer says. “We’re missing out on a whole part of the treatment process,” she says. “Let’s connect people to treatment alternatives, and provide options to get them the help they need.

“Truly, Narcan can save a life – and then that’s our opportunity hopefully to provide services and treatment options to lend real quality to that life.”

HELP: Even the simplest interactions mean so much

“…THAT’S OUR OPPORTUNITY HOPEFULLY TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND TREATMENT OPTIONS TO LEND REAL QUALITY TO LIFE.”

– JENNIFER FISCHER, M.D.

Want to HELP?

Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP) gives volunteers a level of patient contact and responsibility that is unique among hospital programs. Northfield Hospital provides all the training that volunteers need in about three hours.

To volunteer, contact Betsy Spethmann via email at spethmannb@northfieldhospital.org.
Teamwork triumphs in complex surgery

Andy Rezac remembers fighting through some abdominal pain that he called “discomfort” while coaching his son’s hockey team at a tournament. By the end of the weekend, he was in bed with a skyrocketing fever.

A sudden onset of acute diverticulitis, an inflammation or infection in the small pouches in the digestive tract, ravaged a portion of his large intestine, requiring a complex surgery to remove a foot of diseased colon.

“If I had waited a couple of days, it could have been really nasty,” says a grateful and relieved Rezac.

After his initial diagnosis, a regimen of intravenous antibiotics quieted much of the inflammation, but a follow-up CT scan revealed persistent inflammation in the colon with the abscess threatening to invade his bladder.

Andy, 46, is married and the father of three. After graduating from Northfield High School and St. Scholastica, he worked in his father’s plumbing business before venturing out on his own with three ReBath franchises. His diverticulitis was news to him.

Andy spent seven days in the hospital on antibiotics. His condition stabilized, and he was able to go home. His antibiotic therapy continued for three weeks on an outpatient basis through the hospital’s Emergency Department.

But there was a stubborn infection brewing, and surgery was scheduled.

Colon surgery is delicate and complex, in most cases requiring involvement of two surgeons. Drs. Katya Ericson and Chris Nielsen performed Andy’s surgery.

Extensive inflammation in Andy’s colon made it difficult during surgery to identify the ureters – the tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder. Dr. Braasch, a urologist, was enlisted to place lighted stents to protect the ureters. Andy spent six days in the hospital and another week at home recovering. Now he’s back on the ice with his son.

Andy praises the surgeons for their case management, surgical expertise and excellent follow-up. “I could have gone other places to have the surgery, but after consulting with trusted friends who practice medicine themselves, I chose Northfield Hospital,” Andy says. “They have great surgeons, and I wanted to be close to home to make it easy on my family.” He also has praise for the nursing staff and the hospitalists who attended to him in the hospital.

Dr. Ericson says Andy’s was a complex case.

“Whenever there is extensive inflammation, like Andy had, the surgery gets very difficult because we are trying to minimize a long list of potential complications, and that means we move at a very deliberate pace,” she says. “As a relatively new surgeon at Northfield Hospital, I was impressed by the excellent care and the ability of multiple departments to work together in Andy’s case: from his initial admission, hospitalist care, daily antibiotic treatments in the Emergency Department, the flexibility of the urology specialists, and outstanding work of the operating room staff to ensure that the proper equipment was ready for Andy’s surgery. The dedication of our staff to patient care is what makes the Northfield Hospital stand out.”

And now it’s Andy’s second-favorite team.

What is diverticulitis?

Diverticulitis is a common medical condition where pouches in the digestive system become inflamed or infected. One third of Americans, on average, develop the disease by age 60, two thirds by age 85. It often develops quietly without many symptoms. However, when patients develop inflammation and symptoms, those can range from mild abdominal pain to severe abdominal infection requiring emergency surgery.

“AFTER CONSULTING WITH TRUSTED FRIENDS WHO PRACTICE MEDICINE THEMSELVES, I CHOSE NORTHFIELD HOSPITAL FOR MY SURGERY.”

– ANDY REZAC
Dermatology now in Lakeville
FamilyHealth Clinics and Mayo Clinic have partnered to provide dermatology care in Lakeville—a full range of services for common and rare problems. Amer Kalaaji, MD has years of experience and will partner with you for your care. Whether it’s dry skin, a suspicious-looking mole or teenage acne, he listens to your concerns and creates a treatment plan just for you.

Tree of Remembrance returns
Northfield Hospice invites you to pay tribute to someone special in your life and make the season brighter by adding lights to its “Tree of Remembrance” at Northfield Hospital. Consider a memorial to someone you miss, a tribute to a special person in your life or a “thank you” for service or kindness. Purchase a single light for $10 or a string of lights for $100. Funds raised will support hospice services for those with life-limiting illnesses. Visit northfieldhospital.org/services/hospice or call (507) 646-1457.

Flu shots available at all clinics
Got your flu shot yet? All five of our clinics make it convenient and quick for you to protect yourself and those around you. Call for your appointment.