

'SENIOR CARE' NOW CHANGES HEALTHCARE

By: Lynn Foster

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Say the words "Senior Care" and what comes to mind?

For many Americans the phrase conjures up images only of older people living in care facilities for extended periods of time. "Nursing homes" is what we used to call them — many people still do — and for many, they were places to be avoided as long as possible, until there was no better alternative.

If that is still your notion of senior care, let me open your eyes to the new, more positive reality. America's senior-care providers are becoming home to a younger clientele, a transformation that speaks volumes about how the industry has changed and promises a future of better health care for millions of Americans.



Today, senior-care providers are the health care provider of choice for a burgeoning population of physicians and patients, who want quality care in an attractive, affordable and caring setting, supported by innovative techniques and processes. And the results of this transformation are dramatic.

Consider the data just from our centers, where we provide a range of health care services for older Americans. Increasingly, skilled nursing centers are serving as the post-acute resource for thousands of hip replacement patients, the place for physical rehabilitation after any of the myriad joint replacement surgeries done in this country every day.

As a result, the average stay for our post-acute and rehab patients is 30 days, not months and years, as most would imagine. The growth of this business demonstrates the important role that the overlooked and under-appreciated senior-care providers are now playing in the overall health care continuum.

First, the centers offer sophisticated physical rehabilitation and therapy equipment and a staff of professionals who are trained for this type of care.

Second, the centers are focused on providing health care that gets people back to the life they experienced before their accident or surgery, meaning they are treating people for shorter stays, are staffed and prepared for quicker turnarounds and are focused on recovery and a return to an active lifestyle.

In our centers we employ innovative technology to speed placements, pre-reserve rooms, smooth admissions and eliminate concerns for our patients and their doctors.

Finally, the staff in these centers is delivering exceptional outcomes for the patients and their physicians, meaning fewer instances of re-admissions, which makes acute care hospital administrators happy, and helps them achieve the lower re-admissions goals mandated today.

As part of the Affordable Care Act, Medicare will impose increasing penalties on hospitals that have high 30-day re-admission rates.

Coordinating with post-acute care providers like us has emerged as a key strategy for improving quality outcomes for patients, as well as the bottom line finances of the hospitals.

In fact, a recent survey by Health Leaders Media of more than 100 executives from health care provider organizations found that partnerships like this are core parts of their efforts to reduce preventable re-admissions.

When you combine all of this with the fact that care in these centers is less expensive than the same care in an acute care hospital or a specialty rehab hospital, it becomes clear why senior care is now more desirable than ever.

While senior care is the "new" thing in the post-acute healthcare landscape, the new trends fit quite well with NHC's long-standing commitment to provide quality care in a caring environment, with respect for the individual patient.

So don't be surprised to hear a friend tell you that they did their rehab at a skilled nursing center. And don't be surprised when your doctor recommends one for you.

Lynn Foster is the administrator of NHC HealthCare, Murfreesboro. NHC, headquartered in Murfreesboro, is one of the nation's leading providers of senior care, with centers in 10 states, including 39 in Tennessee.