65Plus and Council on Disabilities Awareness partner to improve care for older adults

by Deborah D’Avolio, RN, 65Plus, and Carmen Vega-Barachowitz, CCC-SLP
Council on Disabilities Awareness, Disabilities Access Initiative

It has been shown that providing geriatric assessment and early recognition of geriatric problems can prevent complications and reduce lengths of stay for hospitalized older adults. Older adults comprise the majority of hospitalized patients—they account for 43% of the inpatient population at MGH, and they represent 30% of all visually impaired individuals.

Hearing impairment is the third leading chronic condition affecting older adults. Sensory impairment can impact cognitive function, mood, safety, and quality of life, and sensory impairment increases with age.

In April, 2008, Deborah D’Avolio, RN, geriatric specialist, 65Plus, began implementing bedside geriatric teaching rounds. This is an evidence-based program that provides unit-based geriatric education. The goal is to disseminate best practices in the care of older adults through demonstration and modeling of geriatric assessment and intervention. During geriatric teaching rounds, a significant number of older adults was found to have impairment in vision and/or hearing. This finding highlights the fact that older adults aren’t functioning at their maximum capacity due to limited sensory status.

In response to the evidence, 65Plus began piloting assistive vision and hearing devices. Devices were given to patients who exhibited sensory impairment during geriatric rounds. Feedback from families and patients who used the devices was overwhelmingly positive.

Based on the success of the pilot program, it was clear that assistive devices were an important intervention and in line with our strategic goal to enhance evidence-based practice to promote safety and improve the patient experience. 65Plus, the Council on Disabilities Awareness, and Materials Management, came together to discuss logistics. The Council on Disabilities Awareness, established in 2003 to advise, challenge, and engage the MGH community to create a welcoming and accessible environment for all, views the intervention as a critical step in ensuring optimal care for individuals with hearing and visual disabilities. In 2009, MGH joined with BWH and the Boston Center for Independent Living to launch a major initiative to improve access and care for people with disabilities. The effort focuses on employee awareness and education; the physical environment; patient services; and equipment. The joint effort of the Council on Disabilities Awareness and 65Plus to acquire assistive devices for inpatient units is an example of the kind of collaboration we need to provide optimal care to all patients.

For more information about 65Plus or if you would like to participate in unit-based geriatric rounds, contact Deborah D’Avolio, 65Plus, at 3-4873.

To order a hearing enhancer or handheld magnifier, call Materials Management Customer Service at 6-9114. Inpatient areas, please provide the name of the patient (for tracking purposes). Ambulatory Areas may request up to 10 of each item.