

## Senior Health – Learning History

Organizations like ours try to learn from our experiences, both the successful and not so successful ones. This is a way of assessing our effectiveness and sharing information. It is an important process for the growth of any organization. In doing so, we have recorded some of our learning process around the concept of a “learning history.”

We went back to the source of our Senior Health program - the people who looked up into the night and saw the stars we could become, those who formed the process for driving the program, those who helped to implement and manage it, and those who participated. We tried to capture and convey the experience and insights of these people. The result of this new form of assessment, a Learning History, is put forth on the pages that follow. We believe that what we have learned can help your community think about how you can develop and enhance senior services in your area.

We hope that this learning history will help you chart your own course to the heights you’ve set. Though we’ve seen again and again that no one can have the moon, we’ve seen too, that everyone can hold onto a piece of the sky. The Senior Health program at Memorial has helped us to see the twinkle in the eyes of each and every one of us, regardless of age.

Memorial Health System staff members are more than happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this process. Please feel free to call us at (219) 284-7115.

Phil Newbold

CEO, Memorial Hospital/Health System

A small sampling of past and current activities offered by Memorial’s Senior Services Program provides some idea of their wide variety and number:

*Meeting the Needs of Older Tenants.*

This one-day workshop for landlords, housing managers, nursing home staff and others examined misconceptions about aging, community resources participants might contact on issues related to seniors,

and how to adapt physical environment to better meet senior needs.

*Senior Spiritual Retreat.*

This retreat at the Center brought such sessions as “What the Dying Teach Us: Lessons on Living,” “The Future of Faith,” and “Season of Gratitude.” “What is it to live, to live wholly in the present, to live through death and beyond?” this program asked, encouraging participants to look at the later stages of life as a unique opportunity for understanding the meaning of life and for spiritual awakening.

*The World at Your Fingertips.*

Designed by and for seniors, like so many of the Center’s programs, these classes make instruction and computers available to seniors, teaching the essentials of computer operations, and allowing access to the World Wide Web. Classes are offered all through the year, but waiting lists are common.

*Elderabuse.*

This all-day workshop co-sponsored with St. Joseph’s Medical Center looked at preventing, detecting, and intervening in cases of elderabuse. Featuring professionals like the Prosecuting Attorney, an investigator from Adult Protective Services, a psychiatrist, emergency room physician and many others, this program involved local experts from many fields.

*Communicating with Seniors.*

A seminar for Community Aging Service providers, the purpose of this program was to increase the understanding and enhance the awareness of problems associated with communicating with the older adult population. Stressing communication skills, six sessions explored ways to listen and respond to seniors.

*Your Estate: How to Plan It.*

A financial planning seminar about a broad range of estate planning issues, this workshop covered such topics as how to prevent family misunderstandings over inheritances, keeping your will updated, and taxes.

*Communicating With Comfort: Relating with Young Children.*

This workshop welcomed seniors, grandparents, and day care providers who communicate with young children. Encouraging adults to open up communication with children, the program brought in local experts with experience working with children in situations of trauma and other more traditional settings.

## Studying the Night Sky: Where We’ve Been and Where We’re Going

Analogies to mystery are often made about the skies and the depth of space beyond the Earth that we may never truly comprehend. Yet, great strides have been taken to mark patterns, and even visit. We have started to break down this vastness into parts we can begin to understand without losing our awe. People are not much different, worthy of appreciation, understanding, and wonder. The voyages we take through the marvels of our own lives are a part of the great discoveries of life, a part of health and fulfillment – a part of aging. Senior Services at Memorial have tried not just to take a telescope to this process, but to make services for seniors as much a part of the institution as passages in life are to every one of us.

More than 11% of the population, senior citizens account for over thirty 30% of our nation’s healthcare expenditures (Montague, 1997). They are an ever-changing group as well, Margo DeMont, Ph.D. is quick to add. Margo is the Director of Memorial’s Senior Services, a woman who has charted these changes over the years and used her research and observations to head a dynamic program that moves with the population it’s intended to reach.

And move it has. From a bare-bones membership program in the eighties to today’s new building that houses senior programs about surfing the net, spirituality, and more, Memorial’s Senior Services have grown with the times. In our experience, understanding this evolution has, and continues to be, a critical part of understanding seniors now and what services they’re looking for.

Like many healthcare providers of the time, an early part of Memorial’s experience with senior citizens was based on a membership program that encouraged seniors to seek services, offering special incentives and discounts in the hopes of cornering a senior market. In the mid 1980s,

**The Evolution of Hospital-Sponsored Senior Service Programs**

*The Past*  
 First Generation Senior Membership Programs

- Marketing/Market Share
- Loyalty/Bonding
- Membership Benefits and Discounts
- Social, Educational and Recreational Activities
- Access Point into System

*The Present*  
 Second Generation Senior Membership Programs – Senior Services

- Healthy People 2000
- Health and Wellness Promotion
- Mental Health and Personal Growth
- Intergenerational Activities
- Community Outreach
- Hospital Geriatric Key Function Team
- Quality Indicators/Financials

*The Future*  
 System-wide Integrated Senior Services

- Health and Wellness Promotion
- Disease State Management
- Community Outreach
- Process and Outcome Measures
- Standardized Assessments
- Empowered Consumerism
- Professional Education
- Case Management
- Mind-Body-Spirit Health

*Margo DeMont, Ph.D.  
 Director of Senior Services*

MedAdvantage was Memorial's senior membership program, the meager beginnings of the hospital's services for seniors. Although the program was able to provide benefits like free parking and other small amenities, it wasn't geared toward direct contact. "There was no customer loyalty," says Margo, "There was no attempt to bond or interact. Basically anyone who went through the parking lot and had grey hair would be asked, 'Would you like to belong to the membership program?' ...It was the first generation of membership programs and it was consistent with membership programs throughout the country...With the 1990s, it was time to move beyond discounts."

Memorial launched into researching a new membership program that would prioritize a wider span of senior needs and provide interaction that made the program more than simply "membership." Simultaneously, it bolstered support for Senior Services by drawing in broader constituents -- physicians, community leaders and others. Staff trainings, available for Memorial employees, heightened awareness about senior perspectives and needs. The trainings were designed to break down common myths about aging, and expand knowledge about seniors as a group in three phases:

☐ *Phase One.*

Staff view a video featuring Memorial's CEO, who emphasizes the hospital's commitment to seniors. This section underscores the institution's mission and clarifies common goals to be shared by all staff members.

☐ *Phase Two.*

Employees learn to recognize "the many faces of aging," as they view a video by that name. Produced jointly by St. Joseph's Hospital in Milwaukee and Memorial Health Systems, the video features a senior couple who debunk many of the myths of aging and talk instead of its realities. Some of these myths include the belief that aging is synonymous with disability, that seniors are past the age of accomplishment, and that a person's personality changes as they age. "If a person is grouchy at 70," suggests a training facilitator, "he or she was probably grouchy at 30 or 40."

☐ *Phase Three.*

In the third section of their aging-awareness training, employees have a more direct experience of what it means to be a senior citizen. Wearing yellow goggles to give them a sense of the effects of the yellowing of the cornea and the loss of elasticity in the eye that make focusing more difficult, they also don cotton work gloves. The gloves represent what it's like to have less sensitivity in the wearers' hands as a result of slower blood circulation. "We give each participant a small coin purse – the type you squeeze to open," said Margo, "containing a few coins and washers. We then ask them to extract a penny from the purse, imagining they're in a supermarket with a long line behind them. How do they feel? The answer is usually 'frustrated, because I'm holding people up and they're thinking what a pain these old people are because they can't figure out what change they need.'"

Focus groups that engaged seniors in the design process of a new membership program contributed to Memorial’s efforts to expand and define services, as did another unique method of getting community members involved in the issues facing seniors, and thinking about ideas to address them. More than seven Community Plunges on Aging took place, trips that toured agencies providing services to seniors, and other areas that shed light on the state of senior citizens in our community.

An important goal of the Plunges was to build a base of support to help Memorial fulfill the mission of helping older adults and their caregivers. The nature of the Aging Plunges allowed participants -- hospital staff, community leaders, seniors themselves -- to build up a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement. A special camaraderie was formed among the members of a each Aging Plunge, breaking down the resistance and leading to wonderful exchanges of ideas. JoJo Meehan, Past Chair and Emeritus Board Member of Memorial Hospital and System, went on the first Aging Plunge. She credits it in part to her developing interest in senior programming at the time. Many of the senior organizations and agencies where Plunge members stopped simply, “weren’t helping people deal with some of the things that happen when you get older,” says JoJo, “It was clear that there was not any place in the community at all for real senior services, a place that seniors needed and could enjoy. What was happening was that they were homebound until they went into a nursing home. It was really pretty dismal.”

The Plunges helped build a foundation for the growth of Memorial’s senior services. By increasing empathy and understanding of the issues, a broader base of interest was built. In 1990, almost 400 seniors completed surveys that questioned them about Memorial’s services and what they would find helpful from a senior membership program. (See table below.)

SAGE was the name of the new senior membership program. Not excluding many of the benefits seniors in membership programs had come to expect, the new program added on a strong health education component and was a way to increase support for the growth in programming and services to come. It was the beginning really, of much more.

Service Option	% of Sample Size Responding Favorably
Care Management	70%
Claim Filing Assistance	79%
Discharge Plan	67%
Drug Information Center	46%

Ease of Admittance	84%
Education Programs	40%
Exercise	33%
Finance Planning	31%
Fitness/Wellness	46%
Free Parking	77%
Friendly Visit	51%
Health Screens	70%
Information Coordinator	44%
Medical Screens	62%
Memorial Hospital Discounts	74%
Newsletter	41%
Physician Referral	62%
Respite Care	62%
Social Events	30%

“One of the first things we found was that nobody in the community was doing anything in the area of health education for seniors,” said Margo. Harriet Pritchard remembers that time and agrees. A senior who has participated in Leighton program for years, she has especially enjoyed *Personal Wellness Management* and the series *Lunch With a Doctor*. She says that health education for seniors used to be so different, with very few older members of the community seeking help with their health until they were very sick. “Now, they’re trying to train individuals to take responsibility for their health. Before, they never did that...And we’re living longer, and taking better care of ourselves through the Leighton Center programs. Our outlook, our lifestyle, our aging – is completely different...We’re prepared to take better care of ourselves mentally and physically.”

JoJo Meehan, Past Chair and Emeritus Board Member of Memorial Hospital and System, emphasizes the importance of broadening seniors’ understanding – about health, and health systems. “We are outliving the way Medicare is set up now,” she says, pointing to the necessity of new thinking in the future of healthcare. Effective senior services take into account prevention and educating seniors to move within the healthcare system to access services they need.

Information is critical in understanding the inherent bureaucracy to getting care. JoJo likens the healthcare industry to “trying to do business with an earthquake going on all the time. The base that you’re working on keeps moving.”

Working with the backdrop of these concerns has left a path of challenges and triumphs for Memorial’s Senior Health Services. One of the largest successes was the Leighton Center. With the generous support of Mr. and Mrs. Judd Leighton, plans for the Leighton Center for Senior Health began, a centralized location for a wide range of senior services with the ultimate goal of promoting health and wellness among seniors. It was Memorial’s long-term strategic investment in a rising demand for older adult services in the community. Built across from Memorial

<p>Senior programs at Memorial Hospital will promote a holistic understanding and approach to health for older adults. To facilitate community initiatives of the Organization's strategic goals for older adults;</p>	<p><b>Mission Statement</b></p> <p><b>Memorial Health System Senior Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To advocate that compassionate and caring health services are accessible to senior adults at the appropriate level of care, with the maximum utilization of resources within the health system;</li> <li>○ To facilitate educational and supportive programs for senior adults and the community;</li> <li>○ To facilitate community initiatives of the Organization's strategic goals for older adults;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To advocate that compassionate and caring health services are accessible to senior adults at the appropriate level of care, with the maximum utilization of resources within the health system;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To contribute to gerontological research and education to expand the knowledge of holistic aging;</li> <li>○ To develop channels whereby talents of senior adults can be utilized and valued.</li> </ul>
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Hospital, early goals about what the Center would be included:

- A comprehensive library of materials on senior health.
- The coordinator of a continuum of health and personal care services.
- Host of a variety of older adult activities.
- A referral point for other community resources for seniors.

The building itself was planned and constructed with these goals in mind. A two-story structure with a comfortable, home-like atmosphere, entrances at both floor levels, elevators and city buses ensure easy access. A demonstration kitchen would be available for cooking and nutrition classes on the upper floor. The kitchen too, would be handicap accessible, like all Center facilities. Center meeting rooms were put in for lectures, workshops, recreational activities and meetings of support groups that address specific illnesses.

An assessment of environmental design issues included looking at everything from increased low-glare lighting to the kinds of chairs that would rest in the building. Door fixtures and bathroom facilities were made as easy to use as possible. The hearing needs and other considerations of many seniors are reflected in the very walls of the building. Options like sound-absorbing building materials made Leighton Center attentive to its users even by the surroundings it

offered them. The Leighton Center was opened in May 1991. Inaugural activities included a formal dedication as well as a reception for the family and friends of the Leightons, Memorial Health System and Hospital staff open houses, and special events for SAGE members to celebrate its opening.

Immediately the building began to bustle with lectures and cooking demonstrations, workshops and other activities. Two principles guided these programs and continue to underpin the services offered through Memorial's Senior Services:

- Services that seniors can find locally already will not be duplicated, unless the service is maxed out, and;
- Memorial will always welcome partnership with other organizations.

These were important principles as programs began to develop. Adult daycare would not become a service because of the availability of a strong program by another healthcare provider. Many future programs would have the support of other organizations and community groups, including Memorial's traditional "competitors." This openness has contributed to the "neutrality" of the Leighton Center that staff and seniors alike make note of.

Currently about 26,000 people a year use the building, and Margo verifies that even from the very start the volume of building users was high, despite little publicity. It's this everyday commotion that makes Senior Services and the Leighton Center a success.

### Tips For Clearer Skies In Senior Services Programming

"We struggle with giving our customers what they want versus what we think they need," says Margo. This realization has led to discontinuing group trips that weren't garnering as much interest as expected, and reducing and rethinking Leighton's senior resource library. Margo emphasizes that seniors themselves are the best people to know what they need and want in their lives. *In planning, programmers should take steps to be certain their ideas come from seniors, not themselves* -- it will save backtracking in the future. "They [seniors] have to do what they have to do to complete their lives. Too often we want to 'do for them' -- to infantilize them."

*Outreach to a variety of senior communities is critical in ensuring diverse participants and wide-spread involvement.* In particular, minority seniors require a focus relevant to their lifestyles and needs. Margo emphasizes the importance of having a diverse group of staff and volunteers doing outreach as well. Respect for diversity builds trust.

*Mental health is an* other age groups, and still find meeting this need education and emotional

*important senior issue.* A higher number of seniors suffer from depression then finding ways to address mental health is undoubtedly beneficial. Program staff challenging, and continue to evaluate the best way to integrate mental health support into programming.

*Seniors are “a very savvy group,”* Margo points out, noting that generally they put stock in hard evidence and expertise. Perhaps for this reason programs that bring in professions, particularly medical experts, have been well received. Harriet Pritchard, a senior volunteer and participant at Leighton Center agrees that featuring professionals who can talk frankly in small, comfortable settings is something that’s hard to find anywhere else, and “*you know* that they’re telling you the truth,” she adds.

*A part of Leighton Center’s success is not simply that seniors participate in the programs, but that seniors are the programs.* Organizing classes, newsletters, and workshops, they are both teachers and students, providers and users. Their dual participation role adds both to their feeling of ownership, and the program’s ability to accomplish so much, often with less resources than would typically be required because of such a talented and plentiful volunteer pool.

## Constellations of Every Kind: Living and Learning

The activities taking place on any given day at the Leighton Center are as varied and numerous as the planets. Entering from the parking lot, you might catch a glimpse off to your right of several chefs in the kitchen learning how to make healthy new recipes, or practicing sodium reduction in foods that can be made at home. Downstairs there might be a couple of seniors visiting in the lounge, while a volunteer senior receptionist enters new SAGE memberships into the computer and greets newcomers. Farther into the building senior computer students might be seated at one of several donated computer units while a teacher goes over word processing or email. This is the life of Memorial’s Senior Services, the awesome power of sharing, learning, and enhancing the everyday.

Mary Thomas is a senior who’s been involved at the Leighton Center almost since it opened. Before that she volunteered at the hospital, but when she heard about the SAGE program, she let her interest be known and has worked with the program every since. With a background of office work and management in the local public schools, she was already familiar with data and record keeping. Entering SAGE memberships and answering questions at the Center, she comes at least every week. She can remember doing the bulk of record keeping duties at her job years ago by hand, but “I do it on the computer now,” she says, pointing to the database called up on the screen in front of her. “They were very patient with me,” she said, smiling.

Her volunteer work on the computer is one reason why she signed up for the Center's computer class, and soon she'll be taking a second class. "You'd be surprised at the people who take these [computer] classes and don't even know how to type...There were so many people who didn't even know how to turn a computer on," she said. However, many Leighton computer students have jumped well-beyond turning the computer on to word processing, making greeting cards, and surfing the net. "I think since they've started the computer classes they've been swamped. The older generation wants to know and try to keep up with this younger generation – our grandchildren," said Mary. Currently she is working with other volunteers to train some new recruits, who will also work regularly at the Leighton Center.

Like Mary, an impressive number of seniors who participate in Memorial's Senior Services volunteer locally, at the Leighton Center and many other locations around town. Memorial has recognized the interest and growth in volunteering among seniors and made it a large part of their programming efforts. In fact, of all the things that make up senior health services Margo says, "Our volunteer programs are really becoming, I think, one of the most important parts."

Volunteering has long been recognized as a way for citizens to contribute to healthy communities while simultaneously learning skills, meeting others, and cultivating other individual rewards for the volunteer. Leighton Center itself uses roughly 250 volunteers to track members, teach classes, lead activities and much more. But Leighton Center also serves as a sort of mini-clearinghouse of volunteer opportunities for seniors interested in everything from working with young children to assisting public television.

Many of Memorial's services for seniors are successful precisely because so many seniors are able to provide services for each other themselves. *Friendly Visitors* are seniors who offer support and encouragement to hospitalized seniors. *Caring Callers* make telephone calls to seniors who need a safety check, or other support. Other opportunities send senior volunteers to different segments of the community. The *No Butts About It* team visits elementary schools to discourage students from smoking. *Companions* spend time with patients and their families at Memorial's Radiation Therapy Department, while *Grandbuddies* become pen pals with 4<sup>th</sup> grade students at Stanley Clark School.

Many of these programs are organized and maintained by senior volunteers too, who might recruit new volunteers, expand programming, and coordinate with other programs. Leighton's computer classes in fact, continue to be directed largely by volunteer efforts, a group of seniors who are currently preparing for satellite computer education and use sites. Senior leadership helps guarantee the success of many of the Center's programs, and increases the capacity of what the Center can offer. Margo says that many programs depend on senior volunteer help, which is just fine with her. She admits to being very hands-off in those cases, and says, shrugging, "They tell me what we need and I get it."

Events go beyond the space of the Center as well, to create a presence that has no boundaries. For four years running,

Memorial's Senior Services has sponsored Michiana Senior Expo, a one-day event at downtown's Century Center that includes entertainment, local senior agency and service tables, and most importantly perhaps, the Health Pavillion. Hundreds of seniors get health screenings at the Expo's Pavillion every year. Over 25 stops at the Expo are health-related booths, offering information, services, and the chance to win prizes as well. The Health Pavillion is a large outreach effort, bringing services in high demand to seniors at one place in a friendly and easy to access environment. The total value of free health services given away last year was \$57,100.

Senior Expo is currently home to the Leighton Lectures, a presentation featured every year to honor the Leighton family. During each Expo, a celebrity speaker has addressed issues from surviving cancer to fitness. One of the first Leighton lecturers was exercise enthusiast Jack LaLane. He has been followed by Steve Allen and Jane Meadows, Art Linkletter, and others. This year's Leighton lecturer, Debbie Reynolds, will speak at the upcoming Expo '99.



### Looking To the Future -- Toward the Sun

The theme of Margo DeMont's words, about senior services now and in the future, is change. "It's constantly developing and emerging. The population of seniors is changing so dramatically." She pauses, and continues, "I was going to say we're in the most exciting time – but that's not true. It's been exciting all along."

One way Memorial's Senior Services stays in touch with these changes and how they relate to their programming is by simply asking seniors what they think. About every other year a random sampling of program participants are surveyed. This past April the most recent collection of surveys was compiled by a student intern, showing by and large very positive feedback. "There were some suggestions made that we're going to incorporate," says Margo.

Flexibility and progression has been critical to the program's ability to adapt – adapt to the needs of seniors, to new research and discoveries – to the world, as it moves and reinvents itself. Reinvention is a recent focus of the program, in fact. Currently, plans are in the works to begin a project based on the idea of Sage-ing, a concept developed by Zalman Schacter-Shalomi. A Sage-ing Center will be established next year as a part of Memorial's Senior Services. The Center's programming would focus on two major ideas: self-unfoldment, or spiritual potentiation of the older person, and service to

The Annual Senior Expo's Health Pavillion, offered screenings in the following areas last year alone:

Screening	Total Screened
Prostate Specific Antigen	31
Digital Rectal Exam	31
Breast Exam	36
Depression	46
Blood Pressure Screen	151
Lung Capacity	134
Oxygen Saturation/HR	165
Cardiac Risk Assessment	90
Vision	87
Hearing Screen	63
Brake Response Time	110
Total Cholesterol	252
HLD Cholesterol	250
Triglycerides	252
Glucose	252

others in the community.

Other possibilities on an ever-widening horizon include personal wellness management and re-designing the senior membership program to better serve the population. Internally, the Senior Services program at Memorial is taking steps to look more closely at accountability, backing up to once again get perspective on a rapid process and its outcomes. “We’re asking ‘Why do we do what we do? Why are we here?’” says Margo, who easily answers her own questions, “To provide the tools for individuals to be healthier seniors who will continue to contribute to the community and the community’s health.”

Harriet Pritchard, a senior participant says that the activities she’s been involved with at the Leighton Center have enriched her life and her ability to connect with the lives of others in her community. “I think seniors who are lonely, seniors who are bored – I think they would find the programs and even volunteering [at Leighton Center] a big help in their lives. It has been a big help to me.” Harriet adds jokingly that her daughter can’t wait to turn 55 so she can take advantage of programs at the Leighton Center, too.

Yet as new generations of seniors experience Memorial’s Senior Services, chances are they’ll get something different every year, and make services unique simply by their own individual involvement and participation. Memorial continues to star gaze as new ideas begin to take shape in programming, but the Senior Services program also remembers to turn and stare at the beauty of the people standing right next to them. Margo says with gratitude, “It’s a great, great group to work with.”