

Amy Eilers Heads up Alton Memorial Hospital Department Devoted to Seniors

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ALTON, IL – Amy Eilers believes the name of her department at Alton Memorial Hospital speaks volumes. Eilers is the new program director for the Center for Senior Renewal.

“We hope to be a place where seniors can bring all of their life experiences and work to renew the quality of their lives,” says Eilers (MSW, LCSW). “Many seniors are dealing with a sense of loss, whether it’s the loss of their own independence or the loss of a loved one. They may be struggling with depression or anxiety, and these can be treated. There is hope. We want to help them restore their quality of life so they can go on.”

The Center for Senior Renewal, which recently marked its 10th anniversary at Alton Memorial, is located on the second floor of the hospital’s Olin Wing. Seniors are referred by a physician, a family member, a caregiver or may self-refer. Each person is assessed and an individualized plan is developed. When they start, they will usually come several days per week and spend the morning in group therapy sessions. Each participant in the program also sees medical director Dr. Scott Arbaugh once a month and meets with a therapist for individual therapy regularly.

For Eilers, a Chicago native who now lives in Edwardsville, the center is a natural progression. She has had a private psychotherapy practice and also worked with cancer patients and their loved ones at The Wellness Community. More recently, she worked for Hospice of Southern Illinois in Belleville and covered a multi-county district in southern Illinois.

“This is the population I want to work with,” Eilers says. “And with the baby boomers, the senior population is only going to grow in the coming years. What I like best here is the opportunity to work with a multi-disciplinary team. Our goal is to be a real presence in the hospital and also out in the community.”

Eilers recognizes the link between physical and mental well being, although she acknowledges the human brain is still largely a “black box.”

“About 1 percent to 5 percent of older people experience depression,” she says. “The rate goes up for those who have other chronic health problems. Depression occurs in about 12 percent to 14 percent of senior adults who require home health care or hospitalization. A lot of times symptoms may be dismissed as part of the natural aging process. We want to get in there and find out what’s happening with seniors. After an assessment, we can make recommendations and restore hope.

“Because many of our patients are here two or three times a week and stay for a several hours each visit, they get to be like family for our staff. And I am blessed to have a wonderful staff here. We have three experienced licensed psychotherapists for group and individual therapy, and Carolyn Allred is a fantastic nurse. Dr. Arbaugh, Dr. (Joy) Webster and our techs Sue and Tyler are each an integral part of a top-notch team.”

Senior Renewal also offers transportation to and from the hospital for seniors who can’t get there themselves.

“We think that’s a very important part of the program because it allows people access to vital services they might not otherwise have,” Eilers says. “Everyone on the team here works together. They are professional and compassionate. I’m proud to be associated with them.”

For more information about the Center for Senior Renewal at AMH, call 618-463-7895.

PHOTO BY DAVE WHALEY

The staff at Alton Memorial Hospital’s Center for Senior Renewal includes, front row left to right, Susan Yost and program director Amy Eilers; back row left to right, Tyler Jon