

HIGHLAND HOSPITAL



Hospital Elder Life Program

Important Support for Senior Patients
and Family Members.

Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP)

The **Hospital Elder Life Program at Highland Hospital** provides specialized care for older patients at risk of delirium. Please take a moment to read this overview of our program; our hospital staff and HELP volunteers will be happy to provide additional information and assistance.



About the Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP)

Between 30 percent and 50 percent of seniors experience a decline in their physical and mental abilities during a hospital stay. One of the most common problems they face is delirium, a sudden confused state of mind. Delirium can be distressing for the patient and his or her loved ones and makes it more difficult for patients to recover from illness. Delirium often interferes with sleep and appetite, increases the risk of falls and can prolong the hospital stay.

Fortunately, simple steps such as daily visits to an older patient can help prevent delirium.

As the leading Rochester hospital for the care of older adults, Highland is proud to introduce the Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP).

HELP brings together hospital staff and volunteers to provide regular assessment, supportive visits, recreation and exercise opportunities for seniors at risk of delirium and other cognitive or physical difficulties. The program is a welcome addition to seniors' hospital stay and very effective – it's been shown to reduce delirium rates by as much as 30 percent.

The program helps patients to:

- Maintain their mental and physical functioning throughout their hospital stay
- Remain as independent as possible when they leave the hospital
- Make a smooth, safe transition from the hospital to their home or another care facility
- Prevent unnecessary hospital readmissions

How the Program Helps Older Patients

Working under the guidance of the HELP program coordinator and our medical team, specially trained HELP volunteers make regular visits to older patients.

Activities include:

Daily visits – provides wonderful support and socialization for seniors.

Recreational activities – simple word games and puzzles help patients stay mentally focused and provide recreation.

Meal assistance – encourages patients to receive fluids and nutrients to maintain their strength.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is delirium?

Delirium is an under-recognized but surprisingly common problem, particularly among older adults who are hospitalized. People who are delirious have trouble thinking clearly and maintaining focus. Delirium is different than the long-term confusion seen with dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Delirium can come on within hours, and may come and go throughout the day.

What causes delirium?

It can be caused by a number of things – medications, infection, and simply being in an unfamiliar environment like the hospital. Patients at particular risk for delirium are those who have:

- Memory or thinking problems
- Severe illness
- Dehydration
- Problems seeing or hearing

How is delirium treated?

Depending on the cause of the delirium, treatment may include medication as well as regular contact from our staff and HELP volunteers. Family members also play an important role in helping a patient with delirium. (See the next page for examples of what you can do to help your loved one).

Will my family member recover from delirium?

Most patients do recover from delirium, but recovery time can vary from days to weeks. Each patient is different; your family member's provider can answer specific questions if delirium continues after the hospital stay.

Who can I speak to if I have questions?

You can always speak with any member of our care team if you have questions or concerns.



Things Family Members Can Do To Help

Promote rest by reducing noise and distractions. Keep lights low or off during rest times.

Promote physical activity that is comfortable and safe for your family member; hospital staff can advise you on what is safe.

Encourage healthy eating and, be sure your family member is drinking enough fluids to prevent dehydration.

Help your family member stay oriented to their environment by encouraging them to wear their eyeglasses and hearing aids, if they use them.

Keep your family member engaged by arranging for familiar people to visit frequently. Talking about current events and their surroundings is helpful. Reading out loud is another way to keep your loved one's mind stimulated.

Contact us

Contact the HELP program at **585.341.8433** or email us at **Elderlife@urmc.rochester.edu**

HIGHLAND HOSPITAL

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