

From Futures to Full-Fledged Practitioner-Researcher

Suzanne Gillespie, MD, was always interested in geriatric medicine; but her participation in the AMDA Foundation Futures Program took her interest to a new level and led to a promising career as a practitioner and researcher. She became a long term care physician and in 2008, she received an AMDA Foundation/Pfizer Quality Improvement Award. We sat down with Dr. Gillespie, and she shared her thoughts about the Futures Program, research, and long term care medicine

Foundation: How did the Futures Program transform you?

Gillespie: I got to spend time learning about long term medicine and the role that a practitioner-researcher can play. I got to see what other successful practitioners are doing in the field. I talked to practitioners who are doing wonderful research. And I got to be mentored by people of this stature who made me realize that I could practice and do research simultaneously—I didn’t have to pick one or the other.

Foundation: How did you come up with the idea for your AMDA Foundation/Pfizer Award-winning project?

Gillespie: My long term care colleagues and I were frustrated about what happened when our residents went to the ED. The personnel there didn’t seem to understand these patients and their needs. It seems we were talking about this every day. Then, I found out that that the ED physicians and staff were just as frustrated. Around this time, I received the call for proposals and realized this was a great opportunity. So we designed a project to look at providers’ perceptions about transitions of care.

Foundation: What have you learned thus far?

Gillespie: We’ve made some inroads. We have quantified the sense of frustrations about communication processes, and we’ve developed standardized template to use for communication between settings. The most important part of the project for us is the opportunity to engage the team in ways to improve resident care. We now are looking at reverse communication from the ED to the long term care facility. It’s been an exciting opportunity to thoughtfully improve patient care. Emergency medicine providers, nursing staff, social workers, and hospitalists have been wonderfully enthusiastic. We’ve been able to establish a long term care council of all stakeholders across settings.

Foundation: Why are awards such as this important?

Gillespie: It often is challenging as a clinician to find that bit of financial support to act as a stepping stone to give momentum to the research project. Even though they seem small, studies such as this are fruitful in terms of mining information about patient safety, care, and satisfaction. These kinds of studies are formative to program development.