

***Baby Boomers: A Driving Force in the Changing Health Care Landscape***  
**How Texas Hospitals Are Preparing to Serve the Aging Baby Boomer Population**

**By Sondra Williamson**

The growth of the over-65 population is one of the most significant demographic trends in our nation's history. This year, the roughly 75 million Americans born during the post-World War II baby boom – between 1946 and 1964 – will range in age from 53 to 71. About 3 million baby boomers will reach retirement age every year for about the next 20, climbing to more than 71 million by 2029 – a 73 percent increase since 2011. This exponential growth in the number of elderly patients presents both challenges and opportunities for our health care system.

Boomers are living longer than their parents did, but research shows they are sicker, with higher rates of chronic illnesses such as hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes and obesity. In fact, many elderly patients suffer from several chronic diseases. The health care system will need to adapt to encourage coordination and collaboration among multiple providers, and a larger health care work force will be required to meet boomers' needs. Importantly, geriatric care will need to expand its focus on preventative care and promoting healthy lifestyles.

The Texas Hospital Association (THA) talked to several hospitals in urban, suburban and rural areas of the state to determine how they are preparing to serve the aging baby boomer population.

**A Trailblazing, Holistic Approach to Boomer Care**

With five hospitals, two long-term care facilities and 30 clinics in the Brazos Valley, CHI St. Joseph Health is recognized as the region's health care leader. In its market, the 65-plus

population will grow about 35 percent over the next 10 years – about five times faster than any other segment.

“We’re taking a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary approach to how we care for seniors, merging health and wellness into primary care,” said Donovan French MBA MPH, vice president of strategy for CHI St. Joseph Health-Bryan. “A lot of great services are offered elsewhere for seniors, but they’re very fragmented. Our concept is an all-inclusive health and wellness destination for seniors.”

About four years ago, the system’s leadership began in-depth discussions on how to provide a higher level of coordinated care that was unavailable in the community for seniors with several chronic diseases. Concurrently, the Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine envisioned an opportunity to enhance its curriculum by adding rotations in a geriatric provider community. Together, they held nine focus groups with local seniors to understand their needs and barriers to obtaining medical care, as well as their customer service expectations. An advisory council of local seniors was intricately involved in every facet of planning.

The result of this collaboration is the MatureWell Lifestyle Center, a 23,000 square foot, state-of-the-art health and wellness complex that offers adults 55 years and older a single location to access everything they need to achieve their health and wellness goals, manage chronic disease, and access age-appropriate social and educational opportunities. The first of its kind in the country, the center takes a holistic approach – focusing on mind, body and spirit – to helping seniors improve and prolong their quality of life.

Two board-certified geriatricians are on the center’s staff – medical doctors trained to meet the unique health care needs of older adults. The MatureWell complex includes a gym,

indoor pool and over 200 fitness classes; medication management with onsite pharmacists; a full range of rehabilitation services; and classes on nutrition, disease and lifestyle management. The MatureWell advocate, an RN with case management experience, works with patients to help them navigate the astounding array of services available in the complex and set their appointments.

### **One-Stop Senior Care With Convenience and Bling!**

A similar holistic approach is being taken in Fort Worth by Texas Health Resources, one of the largest faith-based, nonprofit health care delivery systems in the nation, with 24 acute care and short-stay hospitals serving 16 counties in North Central Texas. In March 2014, Texas Health opened its 8,000 square-foot Senior Health & Wellness Center, the brainchild of Texas Health's dynamic president, Lillie Biggins, RN, FACHE.

“When we send a patient home from the emergency department, we tell them to see their primary care doctor within five days,” said Biggins, “but many can't get into a doctor's office because they're Medicare patients, and they end up back in the ED. It's a pattern with the elder population.”

Now, such patients are sent upstairs to the Senior Health & Wellness Center, a treatment facility developed to provide a single venue for coordinated care, with specific attention to the most common problems among the senior population. Treatments are provided by a dedicated team led by a registered geriatrician.

Over many years, Biggins had noticed doctors' offices weren't designed to meet seniors' needs. The chairs were too low, without armrests to help people stand up; the exam tables were

too narrow; and the places were just generally boring. She envisioned a welcoming place of pampering and convenience, including valet parking – “a showplace with so much bling, you’d have no doubt it was for seniors!”

The tone is set by a unique sculptured glass entrance with a “love never fails” theme that visually tells the story of life, from birth to old age, ending with the adult child caring for their parents, as their parents cared for them. Inside, every aspect of the center’s furnishings, layout and artwork is designed for a convenient, comfortable, anxiety-free visit. It is a one-stop shop where patients can receive blood draws, simple x-rays, hearing and visual testing, and all other primary care services appropriate for their age. The center’s exceptional staff ensures every aspect of a patient’s visit is positive, enriching and life-affirming.

The Senior Health & Wellness Center is housed within the Texas Health Harris Methodist Hospital in southwest Fort Worth.

### **A Small City Hospital Focuses on Patient Experience and Pain Management**

With aging baby boomers comprising their largest patient segment, the doctors at the San Angelo Community Medical Center (SACMC) found themselves performing an increasing number hip, knee and shoulder replacements. This increasing service line led to the creation of a dedicated orthopedic unit, the SACMC Community Joint Center. It is one of only a handful of hospitals in Texas using the nationally renowned Marshall Steele approach based on exceptional patient experience through a collaborative approach by caregivers, processes and services.

“We strive to be not only a place of healing, but of caring and connection to our patients and their families,” said orthopedic surgeon and SACMC medical staff member Joe Wilkinson,

M.D.. “The Marshall Steele program dovetails nicely with our efforts to make our patients’ hospital stays as short and pain-free as possible.”

The Joint Care Center is a patient-centered program with physicians, nurses and therapists delivering excellence in elective joint replacement care through standardized, evidence-based services attending to the unique needs of each patient. The center’s compassionate staff is trained to embrace a culture of continual and improvement to enhance the patient’s experience.

The joint center staff supports, educates, and guides the patient through every step of the journey. As a result, there are no surprises, little anxiety, and an expectation they will get better fast. The staff works hard to create a mindset of wellness and positivity. Post-surgical patients eat together in a common dining room and wear their own clothes, instead of hospital gowns.

Pain management is an integral part of the program. By the time a patient is out of the recovery room, their pain is normally controlled with only oral medications. The goal is to get them up and moving sooner, so they can get back to their active lives.

“About 6-70 percent of my patients are baby boomers, and 80-90 percent of them suffer some chronic pain due to lifestyle choices like smoking, obesity, or diabetes,” said Marius Vulcan, M.D., who heads up SACMC’s Pain Management Program. “These things can be cured or prevented with the right changes.”

There is no magic bullet to treat chronic pain. Instead, Dr. Vulcan utilizes a range of treatments, including physical therapy, psychotherapy, chiropractic and alternative approaches like acupuncture tailored to a patient’s individual mindset and goals. There is a major link between chronic pain and anxiety or depression.

Dr. Vulcan regularly goes out into the community, visiting facilities in small towns that refer patients to SACMC to educate their staffs on pain management protocols that rely on beneficial treatments, help wean patients off medications and discourage doctors from over-prescribing.

“When taken to long, prescribed medications exacerbate the very problems they are given to relieve, as well as lead to organ failures,” said Dr. Vulcan. “I work hard to identify the underlying causes of patients’ pain and give them better options.”

### **A Rural Hospital Perspective**

Aging boomers in rural areas tend to be hard-working, self-sustaining individuals – often farmers or ranchers who delay seeking health care until an illness becomes interferes with their work. Reaching out to them with information about the benefits of preventative health care, ----- is challenging.

“Through our chronic care management program, we have been successful in helping these folks maximize their health care benefits, especially through Medicare,” said Jared Chanski, executive vice president of Preferred Management Corporation, which leases and manages the staffs and operations of eight hospital facilities in rural areas of Texas.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recognizes chronic care management (CCM) as a critical component of primary care that contributes to better health care. To receive CCM services, a patient must have two or more chronic conditions expected to last at least 12 months or until the patient’s death.

The CCM program helps patients better understand the health care they receive and emphasizes the link between lifestyle and overall health. It includes screenings for common chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity, and emphasizes preventative steps such as nutrition, exercise and medication compliance to prevent the conditions from worsening.

“Chronic care management is a great way for facilities to keep in touch with boomers and prevent further breakdown of their health,” said Michelle Burdick RN, BSN, care coordinator/clinical health coach of Coleman Medical Associates. “It is helping us change patients’ from a mindset of going to the doctor only because they’re sick to one of lifestyle change and preventative care.”

### **Dedication to Seniors Living Well**

One of the liveliest and most innovative senior wellness programs in Texas can be found at the CHRISTUS St. Michael Health System in Texarkana. Visit there any day, and you’ll find boomers pounding on drums, practicing tai chi and playing harmonicas, just to name a few of the nontraditional wellness classes offered at the hospital’s Senior Health Center.

Each of these seemingly odd practices is specially designed for seniors and has built-in physical and mental benefits. The Drums Alive® Golden Beats program combines the aerobic benefits of dynamic drumming with the brain-enhancing effects of rhythmic drum patterns for a whole brain-whole body experience. Tai chi has been nicknamed the longevity exercise because it provides a low-risk activity that strengthens and improves balance for fall prevention. The harmonica class helps COPD patients better control breathing, exercises the muscles that pull in

and push out air and strengthens abdominal muscles for a more effective cough – all while socializing and having fun.

The Senior Health Center takes a holistic approach to helping baby boomers and older seniors live well. Its staff includes about 20 registered nurses with NICHE designation, physical and occupational therapists, social workers, nutritionists and pharmacists.

The NICHE designation signals a hospital's dedication to enhancing patient-centered care for older adult patients. Through participation in the NICHE program, CHRISTUS St. Michael can offer evidence-based, interdisciplinary approaches that promote better outcomes, positive experiences, and enhanced care for older adults.

“People don't age in the same way or at the same rate,” said CHRISTUS St. Michael President and CEO Chris Karam. “We tailor our approaches to fit the individual's needs, and we provide critical education and support for both the patient and family.”

The center's offerings include programs to help older patients at risk for falls; programs for incontinence and pelvic pain; wheelchair evaluation to check for appropriate fit; and independent, objective driving assessment. On a broader scale, CHRISTUS St. Michael-Texarkana offers its elderly patients the full continuum of care – preventative care, including fitness and lifestyle coaching; hospital and outpatient services; rehabilitation; home health care; transitional care, including telemedicine and home visits; and hospice care.

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