

**EXPLORATORY RESEARCH ON THE BARGER  
SENIOR HEALTH & WELLNESS CENTER --  
Patient and Caregiver Focus Groups**

**TOPLINE REPORT**

June 19, 2002

**Study Design Overview**

Between June 10 and 12, 2002, five focus groups were conducted with family caregivers (one group) and patients (four groups) of the Senior Health & Wellness Center. Patient groups were divided by age – 55 to 69, and 70 plus – and by level of risk – lower and higher. Each group included a mix of genders and a mix of age ranges.

**Overall Patient and Caregiver Experiences – Unaided Discussion**

Patient and family caregiver experiences with the Senior Health & Wellness Center were generally "very favorable" overall. The great majority of patients and caregivers felt the "Barger Clinic" was better than their previous clinic/physician, most felt "much better."

Apparent Strengths

The geriatric orientation was a primary benefit of the Senior Health & Wellness Center, and reason why patients chose to use this clinic. Patients and caregivers appreciated staff expertise in "the whole range of senior problems"; the additional "respect" shown to older patients; and being in a calm, senior-only environment.

Senior Health & Wellness Center staff are generally considered "excellent," from the front office receptionist to the physician and all supporting team members. Staff were praised variously as "wonderful," "friendly," "very caring," "helpful," "accommodating," "efficient" and "thorough." Staff "recognize you" and call patients by name.

Length of time with the doctor is a clear benefit. Patients and caregivers appreciated appointments that are "as long as you need" in which the doctor "takes the time to listen to you, and answer all your questions." Patients rarely felt rushed, in stark contrast to clinics/physicians they had used previously.

The computer system at the Center is appreciated. Most groups liked the Center being connected to other parts of PeaceHealth (e.g. the hospital) via computer; they liked staff entering information during patient visits and providing them with a printout; they liked being able to access their own medical record on-line.

Patients and family praised Center staff for being willing to refer patients to specialists.

Introductory meetings/orientations were well liked. Many had found these meetings helpful and reassuring.

Involving family members was a plus, from both the patient and caregiver perspective – encouraging them to come to appointments, sharing concerns with them and being forthcoming.

Other popular features:

- willingness to help patients with medications – applying for meds at reduced cost, providing samples of expensive meds, keeping track for patients
  
- prompt appointments – minimal waiting
- convenient location – close to home for many
- one-stop shopping
- education on diabetes
- quick appointments – most were able to get in right away if they had a problem
  
- phone system – they answer right away, most were not put on hold for long, they return calls, responsive
  
- pleasing ambiance – modern, clean, the golden dome, beautiful quilts and wall hangings – an "open" feeling
  
- parking – easy, accessible
- good library, helpful library staff.

### Possible Weaknesses

Patients and caregivers perceived something of a "disconnect" between care at the Senior Health & Wellness Center and the hospital. Several patients complained that their PCP did not seem involved during their stay at Sacred Heart; they were disappointed their doctor "didn't even visit" them.

Lower risk patients complained at not always being able to see their own PCP. Caregivers too felt family members were moved around too much, from doctor to doctor, causing confusion and lack of rapport. (Higher risk patients said they usually do get to see their same doctor however.)

A small minority did not like the Barger clinic as well as their previous clinic/physician. Most of these had known their previous doctor for a long time, many had close personal friendships with their doctors. Several had doctors who made house calls. These participants found the service at Barger "less personal."

Some participants complained about the phone system: a substantial minority felt they were kept on hold too long (up to "20 minutes" some claimed); a very small number felt they had to wait too long to be called back. (Most felt callbacks were timely.)

Several patients had found it hard to get an appointment right away: one new patient had to wait "6 months" for an appointment; others had been unable to get immediate appointments when ill or in an emergency.

Several patients felt they had waited too long for test results. Some said results weren't offered; they had to ask for them. Many wanted test results in writing.

Other more minor issues (each mentioned by just a few participants):

- "Don't forget your co-pay" – insulting reminder call message
- Errors in computer record – incorrect dosage for one, an untaken test for another.

(Many participants could think of "no complaints at all" about the Senior Health & Wellness Center.)

### **Specific Elements – Aided Discussion**

Interdisciplinary Team Approach A slight majority of participants were familiar with this approach guiding the service at Senior Health & Wellness; a substantial proportion was not aware of the concept however. Most felt "continuity" and "coordination of care" was handled well. Perceptions about "communication" were somewhat mixed.

Perceived benefits of the team approach:

- Involvement of a pharmacist around medication issues
- Availability and involvement of a dietitian for diabetes treatment and education
- Doctors provide more personal attention, devote more time to patients, support staff take care of other details
  
- Good social worker resources (according to caregivers)
- Convenience – team of professionals at same location
- Individualized care.

Perceived drawbacks:

- Miscommunication between team members resulting in unnecessary medications, calls not returned
- Team members with different opinions, resulting in inconsistent treatment
- Patients can be passed around, requiring them to repeat information too often.

Education and Information Services Most participants were aware of at least some education and information services, particularly the "good library" with its "helpful staff" and books and videos to take home. Participants also mentioned pamphlets in doctors' offices, a "good instructional session on Coumadin," free blood pressure clinics, and the free handbook on aging.

A few in each group had been to classes at Barger or through Oasis – on exercise, nutrition, and driving skills – however the great majority of participants were not aware of what classes were offered or where.

Appointment Scheduling The vast majority of participants liked the way Senior Health & Wellness Center handles appointment scheduling. They liked having the nurse schedule follow-up appointments for them, and being given the choice of making their own appointment. Some wanted to be able to schedule appointments further than 30-days out.

Appointment Length Practically everyone felt they get enough time with the doctor.

Waiting The vast majority felt they did not have to wait too long for appointments at the center. Just a few had waited a long time in the examination room for the physician.

Billing No problems reported with billing.

Phone System The great majority of patients and caregivers felt the phone system was "fine." They liked being answered by a "real person" and most were usually able to get through in a reasonable amount of time. A substantial minority felt they had been kept on hold "too long" however.

One-stop shop While some participants liked this aspect of the Senior Health & Wellness Center, finding it convenient, many noted that it is not truly a one-stop shop since it doesn't house a pharmacy or a full range of specialists.

Prevention orientation The two older patient groups (70 years plus) seemed more aware of the orientation towards prevention than younger patients or caregivers. These older patients praised the Senior Health & Wellness Center's emphasis on education, as part of prevention efforts.

Transportation services, Help with non-medical needs, Medical equipment, Caregiver support services Awareness about these services was very low; in most groups no one

was aware that these services were available at or through the Senior Health & Wellness Center. Many participants expressed interest in these services and wanted more information about what is available.

### **Suggestions for other staff, services**

On-site pharmacy

Vision

Hearing

Physical therapy

Diabetes specialist

Pulmonary specialist

Alternative therapies, information about alternative treatment

More nurse practitioners

Dentist

Non-caffeinated beverages, bottled water

Quarterly newsletter – information about range of services offered, programs, senior calendar.