

HIGHLAND HOSPITAL



Hospital Elder Life Program

Important Support for Senior Patients.
A Rewarding Opportunity for Volunteers.

Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP)

The **Hospital Elder Life Program at Highland Hospital** is designed to make hospital stays safer and more pleasant for older adults. Developed at the Yale University School of Medicine, this program 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.



Volunteering for Hospital Elder Life Program

A few hours of your time can make a world of difference for an older adult who is hospitalized. 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, and increases the risk of falls.

Fortunately, simple steps such as daily visits to an older patient can help prevent delirium. Highland Hospital has introduced the Hospital Elder Life Program, which uses staff interventions and volunteer visits.

The program helps patients most at risk for delirium 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 You Can Help

HELP volunteers play an important role by making regular visits to older patients. The direct contact, conversation and activity during these visits helps seniors stay oriented, relaxed and engaged.

Benefits of Volunteering

- Knowing that you are helping older members of our community and their families to have a better clinical outcome and more pleasant hospital experience.
- Working closely with seniors, families and hospital staff who appreciate the valuable service you provide.
- Developing skills and knowledge about clinical care and hospital operations – this volunteer program is an excellent opportunity for anyone interested in a medical career or social work position.
- Complimentary parking for each shift and a meal voucher for volunteer shifts of four hours or more.

HELP Program FAQs

What do HELP volunteers do?

Volunteers receive training and work closely with hospital staff, patients and families.

Your activities would include:

- **Daily visits** – providing wonderful support and socialization for seniors and help keep them oriented to their surroundings.
- **Recreational activities** – playing simple word games and puzzles with patients, which help them stay mentally focused and provide recreation to make their hospital stay more pleasant.
- **Meal program** – assisting seniors with their meals, opening cartons and providing encouragement so they will receive the fluids and nutrients to maintain their strength.

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.

Will I receive training?

- Yes. Volunteers receive 8 hours of classroom instruction which includes teacher instruction, small group demonstration, role playing and case discussions.
- This is followed by 8 hours of supervision while you carry out your volunteer activities. You'll be partnered with a staff member or an experienced volunteer while you interact with patients.

How much of a time commitment is required?

- Volunteers are asked to commit to at least one 4-hour shift per week for a minimum of 4 months.

How do I sign up to volunteer?

- Contact the HELP program at **585.341.6759**



Contact Us

Contact the HELP program at **585.341.6759**
or email us at **Elderlife@urmc.rochester.edu**

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