

# MERITER® IN MOTION

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The University of  
Pittsburg Medical  
Center Shadyside saw a  
significant reduction in  
delirium in its older  
patients after  
implementing the  
Hospital Elder Life  
Program (HELP) in 2002:

Patients who developed  
delirium while in the  
hospital decreased  
from 22% to 3%

Financial savings from  
HELP exceeds  
\$7 million annually

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“On an average day,  
more than 50 percent  
of Meriter Hospital’s  
patients are 65 years  
and older.”

~Rick Dahl,  
Hospital Elder Life  
Program Coordinator,  
Meriter Hospital

## Extra Care for Older Patients

A common complication among hospitalized older patients is a sudden and temporary change in the way a person thinks. This change in mental state is referred to as delirium.

At least 20 percent of patients 65 years and older will develop delirium while in the hospital. On a national level, that’s more than 2.3 million individuals annually. Studies have found that delirium contributes to:

- longer hospital stays
- increased readmissions
- higher mortality rates

A recent report in *Hospitals & Health Networks* states that health care experts are calling for new standards to treat hospital-acquired delirium, an often undiagnosed problem.

## Transforming Bedside Care with HELP

Health care experts at Yale University developed a program that focuses on more personalized care for elderly patients. The *Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP)* is a multi-step approach to keep patients engaged and active which aids in their recovery.

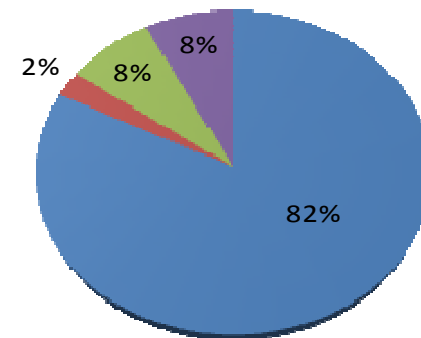
Patients receive extra attention with activities that have been identified as helpful in reducing delirium:

- Engage patients in conversation
- Encourage movement and bedside exercises
- Assist patients with eating and drinking
- Provide relaxation methods to aid in sleep

HELP volunteers receive 32 hours of classroom training and shadowing experience prior to working independently. Volunteers have the opportunity to notice subtle changes in patients, communicate concerns and serve as a resource for other hospital staff.

## Meriter's HELP Volunteers

- 33 College Students
- 1 Registered Nurse
- 3 Retired Professionals
- 3 Adult Volunteers





The majority (82%) of HELP volunteers at Meriter, like Whitney and Courtney pictured above, are college students preparing for careers in health care fields. Whitney is a biomedical engineering student and Courtney is studying medical microbiology and immunology.

## A Caring and Dedicated Volunteer Network

In 2010, Meriter Hospital adopted the HELP program and trained a network of volunteers, including many college students preparing for careers in health care fields. This dedicated group of 40 volunteers have provided extra care to more than 279 elderly patients.

“The dedication of our volunteers is impressive,” stated Rick Dahl, Meriter’s HELP Program Coordinator. “In February, one of our UW student volunteers, Courtney Buss, made her way through a blizzard and arrived at Meriter by 7:30 a.m. to assist patients with breakfast. Even though her classes were canceled for the day, she still made it in to help our patients,” he said.

For medical and nursing school students, this volunteer experience offers valuable training in compassionate care of the elderly and skills that they will carry with them in the future.

Meriter’s HELP program was made possible through a grant from Meriter Foundation. Annual funding for this program will provide ongoing training and expand the number of volunteers.

***Currently, the HELP program at Meriter is only able to reach 25 percent of our targeted 70 and older population. With your support, we can significantly increase our efforts.***



**“Wrinkles should  
merely indicate  
where smiles  
have been.”**

~Mark Twain

**MERITER<sup>®</sup>**

*Foundation*

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