

GET TO KNOW: SUNITA HANJURA, MD



Sunita Hanjura, MD, says she is comfortable with the things that older patients tend to need, such as psychiatry and neurology services.

It was her father, an oncologist, who inspired her to pursue medicine; Sunita Hanjura, MD, gravitated to internal medicine and geriatrics. She completed a fellowship at University Hospitals of Cleveland and George Washington University Hospital. Today Dr. Hanjura is in practice at Bedford-Lexington Internal Medicine with Norman Weinberg, MD. In 2010, Life Care Centers recognized her as medical director of the year in the U.S. for her efforts at improving quality and the coordination of care.

When you left the Washington, DC, area eight years ago, what were you looking for?

I wanted a similar setting to the large internal medicine practice I was in there, but I wanted to be in a smaller group and to deliver more personalized care. Also, I wanted to live and work in the same community, because I think it helps me understand my patients better. I run into my patients around Lexington, and it's a lot of fun. I like the fact that our kids go to school with my patients' kids. In some cases, I take care of all three generations of one family. You really get to know people, which is one of the joys of practicing primary care.

“I love practicing geriatrics. These are people who have gone through the Depression, World War II and the Korean War. They've served their country, so we've got to take good care of them.” – Sunita Hanjura, MD

What drew you to practice geriatrics?

When I was training, we did a lot of intensive care work. I realized we were really good at performing procedures, but in many ways we were ignoring the needs of our elderly patients. Many frail elderly folks have psychosocial issues that need to be addressed. I was fortunate to have a wonderful director of geriatrics at Case Western; he really encouraged me. I came to Boston and saw there were opportunities — not only in geriatric office practice, but as medical director of area facilities. I work with Life Care Center of Acton and Rivercrest Deaconess in Concord and also see patients at Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford.

How often do you visit those facilities?

As medical director, I visit twice a week, mostly to see patients who have just been discharged from the hospital. I'm grateful to the hospitalists at Emerson; the discharge summaries are fantastic and provide a good synopsis that helps in the continuum of care for our patients. I take it from there, because my job is to ensure patients have the care they need to get home again; that's the goal. The Emerson hospitalists not only provide my patients with excellent care; they make my job as medical director at the two facilities easy.

Why don't more people become geriatricians?

It's very demanding, and it's not sexy. When you meet a new patient, they have multiple different medical problems and are on a number of different medications. They may have had a heart attack, survived breast cancer and had several surgeries. As one of my former colleagues once said: “better you than me.” In reality, all primary care physicians deal with a lot of older patients. Because of my training, I'm very comfortable with the things that older patients tend to need, such

as psychiatric care and neurology services. And I love practicing geriatrics. These are people who have gone through the Depression, World War II and the Korean War. They've served their country, so we've got to take good care of them.

Primary care physicians tend to be pressed for time. Is that true for you?

I think you can find a balance. We do spend a lot of time with our patients; they feel well cared for. Our joke is we provide concierge care without the concierge payments. If you reach the point where you're too busy, get help. We make sure we have open appointments. We have a nurse practitioner, Heidi Doreau, and if we need to bring in another doctor, we'll do that.

What do you enjoy in your spare time?

I like gardening, and I like to exercise. I used to run, but now I walk and cycle. We travel a bit; recently, I've been to Italy and South Africa. In April, my son and I went with a group from Texas that provided relief in Haiti. I worked in a clinic there. Closer to home, I'm on the board of the Cary Memorial Library in Lexington and co-chair the stewardship and cultivation committee. We do programming, fundraising and outreach. Libraries are very democratic institutions we need to preserve.

SNAPSHOT

Age: 50
Grew up in: Shillington, PA
Resident of: Lexington (eight years)
Personal: Married with three children, age 22, 19 and 16
Reading habits: Novels, recently “The Angel's Game” by Carlos Ruiz Zafon