

Toppenish Community Hospital: “Life Transitions” Opens Doors for Geriatric Mental Health Services

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Opening its doors in July 2008, Life Transitions (LT) of Toppenish Community Hospital, located at 502 West 4th Avenue, Toppenish, WA, began offering a short-stay behavioral health program for older adults who suffer from psychiatric, emotional and behavioral disorders. Featuring intensive, comprehensive mental health care in an inpatient setting, LT provides a warm and welcoming environment for adults 55 years and older, according to Joyce Ruff-Delgado MS, LMHC, BCPC, and Program Director. The 15-bed inpatient facility is designed for persons with symptoms or behaviors that are interfering with social, emotional, physical and relational/familial functioning. “Our patients are referred to us from as far away as Oregon,” Ruff-Delgado explains. “With several hospitals closing or losing beds, the need is great and we can provide the patient-centered care that uniquely benefits our clients.”

Patients who’ve not benefited from other treatment options, are experiencing an emotional decline or mental changes, or patients exhibiting signs of Post-Trauma Stress Disorder are assessed for

inpatient treatment and voluntary placement in the facility. This short-stay (typically 10 days or less) inpatient program provides 24-hour oversight, individual and group therapy, adult daily learning skills, group activities and assists clients in setting goals for continuing treatment objectives once they leave LT. Ruff-Delgado believes the small and flexible nature of the program encourages open communication between patient, family and treatment specialists – and sharing the hospital’s location is an added benefit to clients. “Our wing is the envy of the entire hospital community,” says Ruff-Delgado. “With a renovation of over two million dollars, our unit offers updated facilities that still manage to be comfortable and homey for our clients while providing access to all the features and functions of the hospital.”

As at Toppenish Community Hospital, LT delivers care using a team approach. Multi-disciplinary teams consisting of nurses, social workers, professional counselors, mental health staff, and physicians provide individualized care that stresses dignity and helping the patient live life to its fullest. Ruff-Delgado has more than thirty years experience in the field of behavioral health and believes LT meets

the growing needs for seniors requiring mental health support. “Almost 20% of people over the age of 55 experience behavioral problems not related to aging,” she explains. Symptoms such as a lack of energy or motivation, constant worrying, poor appetite, difficulty sleeping, confused thinking, feelings of sadness, or a change in temperament can be indications that an assessment is warranted.

Once a free mental health assessment is completed by Ruff-Delgado or her staff, inpatient treatment may offer the most benefit to the client. “Our primary objective is to return the patient to their previous level of functioning,” adds Ruff-Delgado. “We rule out any medical issues, establish trusting therapeutic relationships and provide a structured, personalized program for each client.”

Although LT is a secure, locked facility, Ruff-Delgado stresses that clients share a unique and informal atmosphere with both staff and family; open communication is valued, individual and cultural issues are discussed openly, and visitation by family and friends is encouraged. Utilizing warm, cream tones and natural fabrics, the semi-private and private rooms of LT are somewhat “spa-like” – each room features specialized beds,

double paned windows, bedding and privacy curtains in rich, forest hues, and a TV/VCR combination. Common areas are decorated in the same warm tones and art work and fresh flower arrangements add a welcoming touch; an on-site kitchenette is also available.

Once a patient has received a diagnosis of an Axis I Psychiatric Disorder, voluntary placement at LT is

possible. Patients receive the benefits of overall healthcare, treatment planning, grief and loss resolution, medication management, education, stress management, coping and living skills and discharge planning. In addition to the skilled nursing staff, a psychiatrist is on the unit Monday – Friday. “A market feasibility study conducted by Diamond Health Care support-

ed the need for Life Transitions in our community,” concludes Ruff-Delgado. “The demand for senior behavioral health services is going to continue to grow – and we will provide customized care to help our clients deal with these unique issues in a caring and dignified manner.”

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