

Real World Medicine

Dr. Peter Pompei and Lytton Gardens Offer Up a Unique Program for Stanford University Medical Students

It's Wednesday morning, and Peter Pompei, M.D., Clinical Professor of Medicine at the Stanford University School of Medicine, is meeting with his team of clinicians in training.



As they do on every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the team discusses the day's cases and then heads up to the floors to see patients. Just a normal day at the Stanford Hospital and Clinics.

Except that this meeting is not taking place at Stanford. The students, who are members of Stanford's Geriatric Care Team, are getting an exposure to the realities of long-term care for the elderly. And Dr. Pompei, who is also the Medical Director at Lytton Gardens Health Care Center, is their guide to a world that few, if any, of them have been exposed to before.



“There's a need for a place where students, residents, and fellows can see real world situations and environments as part of their training and education,” says Dr. Pompei, who prefers to be called Peter. “Lytton Gardens is a community based nursing home, which allows the students to see patients from a wide range of diverse backgrounds.”

Pay attention to the man behind the curtain

Peter Pompei is a smiling, gentle man who has an easy manner with students and patients alike. He takes his group of students on “patient rounds” at Lytton three days a week, during which he answers questions patiently and thoroughly and encourages the students to offer input.

With over 30 years in the medical profession, 18 of which he has spent providing geriatric care in



a skilled nursing facility, Peter has authored numerous articles and books on topics related to geriatrics. One of his specialties is how to effectively teach geriatric medicine, which he believes requires a wider medical skill set to address the needs of older patients.

In a hospital, the focus is on acute care: dealing with one or two major problems that require a hospital stay. But the medical students need to understand what will happen when, someday, they give the order to discharge a patient from the hospital.

Peter points out, “When students come to Lytton Gardens, they get to see ‘behind the curtain’. As doctors, they will be sending their patients to nursing homes or health care centers to recover and regain function, and they need to know what is available to patients in these facilities.”



By working with Peter at Lytton, these students get to see what kind of long term care there is, who is involved in onsite patient care, and what can reasonably be expected for patients’ ongoing well-being.

One body, indivisible

Rather than dealing with a single medical specialty, such as cardiology or orthopedics, students are involved in a whole assessment of the older adult and how each bodily system affects the others and the overall healing progress.

Peter insists that students learn to share in medical decision making, not only with him and each other, but with the onsite Interdisciplinary Team at Lytton. “The Interdisciplinary Team is what really makes the learning possible. They care day in and day out for these patients, doing the best they can for their recovery.”

The students get to see just how many people are involved in each patient’s care: the director of nursing, social workers, rehabilitation therapists, and leaders for spiritual and enrichment activities to keep the whole person engaged.

“Do they really need these 15 meds?”

With the high-tech facilities available at Stanford hospital, it can be easy to rely on cutting edge medicine, but older patients are likely to have several “layers” of issues which encompass a larger realm of symptoms.

At Lytton, there is a focus on patient comfort and on simplifying regimens.

Students in the program are encouraged to develop the skills necessary to ferret out the most appropriate and direct solution to a health problem.



“They get to see which resources are truly available,” Peter says. “If some of the tests or treatments they want to use aren’t feasible, they have to come up with alternative approaches and ideas that the group shares. This encourages them to think creatively.”

This approach better prepares the students to be innovative and to avoid prescribing tests or medications that aren't always necessary or appropriate.

“I like the students to think about these questions: What are the hopes and dreams of the patient? What are the goals of care? Do they really need these 15 meds?” Peter asks. “What are we trying to achieve here?”

Teaching patience with patients

Lytton Gardens, with its convenient location only three miles from Stanford, is the perfect setting for Dr. Pompei's unique teaching program.

The population at Lytton Gardens provides a rich environment with residents from different cultures who feel differently about health and wellness. Students work with patients who hold different beliefs, and must learn to be patient as they deal with each family's expectations for their loved ones.

Another advantage of the Lytton program is the slower pace. Peter points out, “In a hospital the treatments are given over days; here it is over weeks, so students see the evolution of symptoms over a longer time frame.”

Geriatric medicine is already a required component in the study of internal medicine, but Peter thinks that today's students need to experience the full complexity of caring for older patients. “With our aging population and a greater need for trained physicians in geriatrics, the academic foundation of today's students needs to be at a higher level,” Peter says. A higher level that he, in concert with the patients and staff at Lytton Gardens, is providing to Stanford's physicians of tomorrow.

