

**TO:** Robert W. Healy, City Manager  
**FROM:** Dennis Keefe, Commissioner of Public Health  
& Chief Executive Officer of Cambridge Health Alliance  
**DATE:** February 11, 2007  
**SUBJECT:** Response to Policy Order #3, dated 12/18/06

**Text of Order:** That the City Manager be and hereby is requested to report back to the City Council regarding plans for the Senior Health Center at the Citywide Senior Center.

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The Cambridge Hospital opened the Oliver Farnum Senior Health Center on the third floor of the Citywide Senior Center in 1994. The premise was that seniors would have access to multiple geriatric services in one location. Over time, however, it has become apparent that the majority of patients using the Senior Health Center are not seniors. Only 15% of the patients are over 65 years.

The reasons for this are multiple:

1. The physical environment of the Senior Health Center is not conducive to attracting or serving a frail, elderly population. Accessibility issues include:
  - Limited parking in Central Square
  - Limited space in front of the building for ambulettes (wheelchair-accessible vehicles) to drop off and pick up patients
  - Location of the health center on the third floor
2. The ability of the Senior Health Center to provide a comprehensive array of services to elder patients has been constrained by the size of the office suite. Important functions like laboratory testing and radiology are performed off-site. The Cambridge Health Alliance continues to seek a space in Central Square large enough for a comprehensive health center.
3. Older adults tend to have strong relationships with their primary care physicians (especially if the relationship has spanned many years) and are unlikely to switch providers or health care systems once they turn 65 unless there is a compelling reason to do so (e.g., a new insurance plan no longer covers their provider).

## **A New Focus**

Given the current utilization, Cambridge Health Alliance has decided to use the existing site as a primary care center for women's health. The new center would take a comprehensive approach to women's health and serve women age 18 and older, including seniors.

## **Patient Transition**

All patients who currently receive services at the Senior Health Center will be contacted and informed that the health center is changing focus. They will have several choices for care:

- All patients (male and female, elderly and other) will have the opportunity to continue receiving primary care at 806 Massachusetts Ave.
- All patients (male and female, elderly and other) will have the opportunity to keep their primary care providers whether that provider is at the Senior Health Center or reassigned to another Cambridge Health Alliance site.
- If patients choose to receive care at another Cambridge Health Alliance site (because their doctor or nurse has been reassigned to this site or they want a new provider), staff will assist them with the transition by helping them with appointments.

Regardless of where seniors get their primary care, acute care services will continue to be available to the women and men attending programs at the Citywide Senior Center.

### **Staffing**

Support staff (front desk, medical assistants and nursing) will remain the same. Additional training will be available for them to compliment the shift in focus. Providers at the site will need to have experience in women's health. Those with other skills will be reassigned to another Cambridge Health Alliance site.

### **Vision for Geriatrics Care**

While the focus of the health center is changing, Cambridge Health Alliance remains committed to seniors and is currently expanding its services to this population. In spring 2006, Dr. Anne Fabiny was hired as the new Chief of Geriatrics for Cambridge Health Alliance. The Geriatrics Program is focusing on strengthening the "continuum of care" for older adult patients.

The Alliance is also committed to maintaining and growing its existing clinical programs for seniors. These specialized programs and services include:

- **Senior Health Connections** – A free telephone service (617-665-1665) that provides general health and health care information, referrals for specialized services, links to Alliance services and community-based organizations, and other services.
- **Elder Service Plan** – A comprehensive program designed for frail elders who are nursing-home eligible but wish to remain at home. The program provides general primary care, rehabilitation, and wellness services at an adult day center and at home.
- **House Calls** – This program provides primary care services to about 220 homebound seniors who wish to remain at home and do not have access to a doctor's office.
- **Nursing home care** – Alliance physicians provide care for seniors in assisted living facilities and nursing homes. In addition, Alliance physicians serve as the medical directors for several nursing homes, including Neville Center.
- **Mental Health Services** – Cambridge Health Alliance offers mental health and counseling services for adults age 60 and over through its Harvard-affiliated Department of Psychiatry.