

39TH AJFCA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

MAY 15-17, 2011

The Westin Hotel, Calgary, Alberta

THE GOODMAN AWARD SUBMISSION FORM

I. General Information

- a. Program Title: **Patient Partners**
- b. Agency Name: **Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County**
- c. Date Program Began: **January 2009; development of program began in 2008**

II. Summary

Initial Problem(s) to be Addressed by the Program: *“No older adult should have to go to the doctor alone.”* This phrase was the impetus for the development of Patient Partners, an innovative program that transforms the lonely, confusing, and overwhelming experience that older adults face when navigating the health care system into a supportive, educational, and empowering experience. Research shows that only 15% of patients fully understand what their doctors tell them, and 50% leave their doctors’ offices uncertain of what they need to do to take care of themselves.ⁱ This is problematic because patients “who understand their doctors are more likely to acknowledge health problems, understand their treatment options...and follow their medication schedules,”ⁱⁱ and, conversely, those who do not, suffer adverse health consequences. Good doctor-patient communication has been shown to lead to lower blood sugar levels, lower blood pressure, reduced pain, and improved health in people with a variety of illnesses.ⁱⁱⁱ

For many older adults who grew up in a culture in which doctors were not to be questioned and who now may face hearing loss, cognitive impairment, low health literacy, and an increasingly complex medical care system, communicating well with physicians is best accomplished with the assistance of a trusted family caregiver. However, caregivers are not always available to accompany their aging loved ones to medical appointments, due to geographic distance or their own work obligations.

Brief Overall Program Description: The JFS Patient Partners program trains highly skilled volunteers to accompany older adults not only *to* medical appointments but *through* the appointment. Volunteers meet with older patients before their medical appointment to assist in preparing questions for the doctor. They drive clients to the appointment or ride together in our JFS van. At the appointment, they assist the elders in asking appropriate questions and relaying medical concerns, request translation of medical lingo into layman’s terms, and write a detailed summary of what transpired at the appointment to share with family caregivers. Patient Partner volunteers both ease the strain on caregivers and ensure that older adults receive medical care that they can comprehend.

III. Components

- a. **Jewish Component:** Patient Partners addresses the Jewish value of respect for elders (Hiddur P'nai Zakken), as well as the Jewish cultural tradition that respects the individual's right to inquire and question. Patient Partner volunteers are offered a training entitled “Cultural Competency in Working with Jewish Older Adults,” which describes Jewish traditions, culture, and values as they relate to Jewish older adults.

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- b. **Outreach Component:** JFS Patient Partners targets older adults who, as a result of social isolation, do not have an adequate social support system at medical appointments. Roughly 66% of the older adults served are below the median income for Washtenaw County, with 16% subsisting below the poverty level. Clients represent diverse racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Without Patient Partners, many of these individuals would not be able to keep their medical appointments.
- c. **Community-Building Component:** Patient Partners builds community in the opportunity it provides to retired professionals and skilled volunteers to make a meaningful contribution in a flexible and stimulating way. Patient Partners was highlighted for this reason in an October 2009 AJFCA conference call on “Creative Program Models for Engaging Boomers as Volunteers.” Volunteers go through the transformational experience of reaching out and helping older adults in powerful and purposeful ways, and older adults, no longer scared and isolated, become active participants in their health care experience.

IV. Outcomes

- a. **Outcomes of the Program to Date:** We have trained three cohorts of volunteers in our intensive 15-hour training program, which receives high praise from volunteers as “first-rate” and “one of the best trainings I’ve ever attended.” These 25 volunteers have accompanied approximately 50 older adults to 172 medical appointments. Patient Partners has garnered widespread attention: It was featured on Michigan Radio, an NPR affiliate, and on WDIV Detroit’s Channel 4 News, and presented at the American Society on Aging’s national conference in March 2010.
- b. **Evaluation Method:** JFS conducts client surveys measuring accessibility, efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction with services provided. Patient Partners maintains high ratings in all four areas (85% to 100% positive responses). We are in the process of developing further evaluation tools for Patient Partners.

V. Sustainability

- a. **Total Program Cost:** \$60,000
- b. **Major Income Sources:** We charge clients \$20 per accompaniment (sliding fee available), which includes transportation. We have received in the past funding from local funders (e.g. Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation) and national funders (e.g. Edward and Della Thome Foundation) for this program.
- c. **Agency’s Plans for the Continuation of the Program:** We are proud of this successful and innovative model and plan to continue offering Patient Partners indefinitely. We are creating a replication kit to offer Patient Partners to other agencies interested in serving seniors in the medical environment, and the sale of these replication kits will add to the program revenue stream.

VI. Contact Information

- a. Contact Person’s Name: **Abigail Lawrence-Jacobson, MSW, Ph.D.**
- b. Contact Person’s Title: **Director of Older Adult Services**
- c. Contact Person’s Telephone Number: **734-769-0209**
- d. Contact Person’s Email Address: abbie@jfsannarbor.org

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ⁱ Levine, Meredith. June 1, 2004. "Tell the Doctor All Your Problems, but Keep It to Less Than a Minute." New York Times.

ⁱⁱ Travaline, Ruchinskas, and D'Alonzo, Jr. 2005. "Patient-Physician Communication: Why and How." Journal of the American Osteopathic Association, vol 105: 1, p. 13-18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Levine, Meredith. June 1, 2004. "Tell the Doctor All Your Problems, but Keep It to Less Than a Minute." New York Times.