

# Implementation of a Volunteer-Based Hospital Program for Older Adults

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## Background

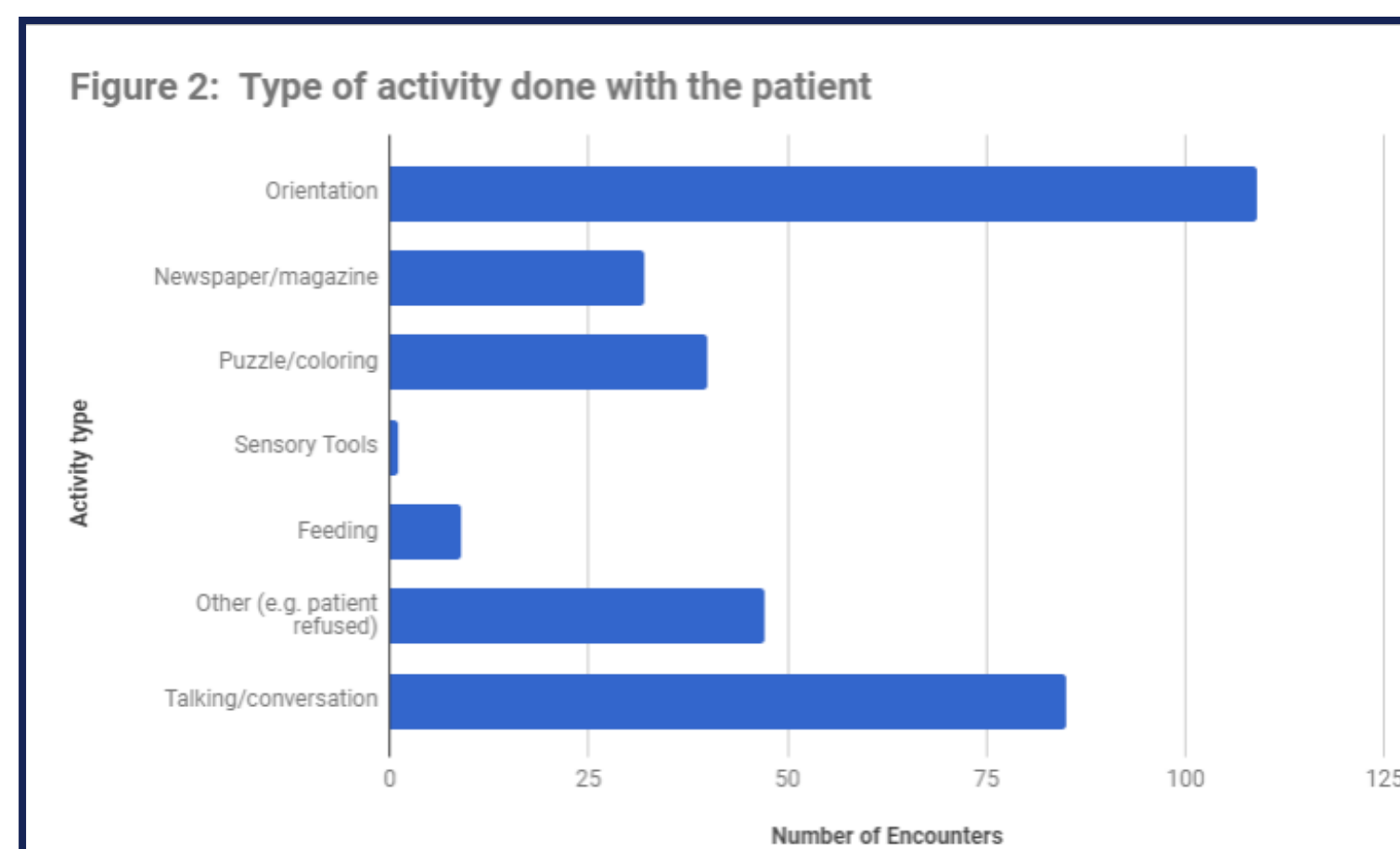
- A multi-faceted, volunteer-led, hospital-based program<sup>1</sup> has been shown to:
  - Reduce the incidence of delirium
  - Decrease hospital length of stay
  - Reduce hospital costs.
- Implementation of such a program requires upfront investment.
- A smaller, volunteer-based visitation program for older adults may provide support for the allocation of more hospital resources in delirium prevention and establishment of a formal Hospital Elder Life Program<sup>1</sup> in this institution.
- This research aims to investigate:
  - If the implementation of a visitation program is feasible at this hospital
  - Volunteer experience with the program.

## Methods

- Pilot program on inpatient hospital medical-surgical units in a large, urban academic medical center
- Volunteers were recruited and trained to complete structured activities based on the Hospital Elder Life Program<sup>1</sup>.
- Patients were referred to volunteers by unit nurses.
- Volunteers completed questionnaires about their visit with each patient.
- Pilot period from 11/14/2017 to 3/30/2018
- Data from the questionnaires over the pilot period were compiled.
  - Quantitative measures:
    - Time spent with the patient
    - Type of activity done with the patient
  - Qualitative measure:
    - Feedback from volunteers for each visit

## Results

- 42 volunteers were trained over 6 sessions.
- 236 patient visits were conducted during the pilot period.
- Each volunteer saw 2.5 patients on average during a 3 hour volunteer shift.
- 73% of visits were shorter than 30 minutes.
- Approximately 86% of patients were seen only once.
- Approximately 10% of patients declined a visit with volunteers.
- Orientation and conversation-based activities were the most common interventions done with patients.
- Comments from volunteers included concerns about individual patients' well-being, concerns, and interests.



## SELECTED COMMENTS FROM VOLUNTEERS

*"She didn't seem to want company in the beginning, however she really enjoyed the visit and was much more welcoming at the end."*

*"[The patient] was very happy to have some company. She loved to talk about her grandkids and her husband who was in the Marines."*

*"[The patient] enjoyed the company and was very happy when she got a visit."*

*"Patient was resting when I came in. When she woke, she kindly said that she didn't sleep well last night and just wanted to rest."*

*"[The patient] enjoyed the company and was very happy when she got a visit."*

## Conclusion

- There was robust interest in the volunteer training program among the hospital volunteer staff.
- Nearly all patients in the study were seen only once.
- The majority of visits were also shorter than 30 minutes.
- Further research is needed to determine the program's impact on delirium rates.
- Volunteer training will be focused at directing volunteers to maintain continuity with patients and engage them more fully during the visit.
- This research provides evidence that it is feasible to implement a volunteer-based visitation program at our hospital.
- Feedback regarding the program from volunteers is largely positive and shows concern for patients.

## Reference

1. Inouye SK, et al. The Hospital Elder Life Program: a model of care to prevent cognitive and functional decline in older hospitalized patients. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 2000;48:1697-1706.