



## GARY AND MARY WEST SENIOR EMERGENCY UNIT AT UC SAN DIEGO HEALTH

# The Gold Standard in Geriatric Emergency Department Care

In 2019, a growing 33% of San Diego County Emergency Department (ED) encounters were made by people over 60 years old and the writing was on the wall—prepare for the changing patient population or face incredible challenges meeting the future needs of the community. In response, UC San Diego Health’s Jacobs Medical Center established the first Geriatric Emergency Department (GED) in the state of California and later opened a dedicated space in the ED for geriatric emergency medicine—the Gary and Mary West Senior Emergency Care Unit (SECU). UC San Diego Health’s GED was made possible through a partnership with West Health. This collaboration included funding for the construction of a specialized geriatric care unit and a five-year research partnership with a shared vision to create, implement, and share best practices in geriatric care, with the ultimate goal of expanding the GED model statewide.

Since then, the Gary and Mary West SECU has set the gold standard of geriatric emergency care in California by providing safe and high-quality care, accelerating research and innovation, and leading training and development for California hospitals. Population growth of older adults is occurring nationally, and here in San Diego, UC San Diego Health is leading the charge in ensuring older adults receive the very best care.

### High-Quality Clinical Care

The commitment of the SECU clinical teams is to provide safe and appropriate care for older adult patients, while ensuring efficient use of hospital beds for those in greatest need of hospital-level care. The SECU has transformed clinical care and patient and caregiver experience through technological improvements, a passionate workforce, and the clinical environment. Older adults and their families have a choice in where to seek emergency care in San Diego County and the SECU has stood out as a haven for the specialized care older adults need and the patient-centered care they desire.



Older adult patients face common complications, such as being high risk for falls and cognitive challenges. In this dedicated space, we provide a much more holistic approach to medicine, following the age-friendly health system model, to ensure needs are being addressed in the patient’s preferred way ”

**DR. VAISHAL TOLIA**

Medical Director of the Department of Emergency Medicine at UC San Diego Health

## The Geriatric Emergency Nurse Specialist

One important feature of the SECU's success in caring for older adults is the Geriatric Emergency Nurse Initiative Expert (GENIE). The GENIE is a nurse who consults with older adults in the ED with frailty, vulnerabilities, unmet needs, or life circumstances that create a higher risk of complications or revisits to the ED. At the SECU the GENIE focuses on reducing admissions for highly complex, yet low acuity, patients who could be better served at home or in another care setting. These patients are often admitted to the hospital without GENIE services due to safety concerns or other chronic conditions. They also connect at-risk patients to the SECU's multidisciplinary support team of physicians, nurses, physical therapists, pharmacists and social workers to meet the various needs of their patients. The GENIE acts as a champion for providing education to clinical staff in geriatric care as a part of ongoing efforts to serve older adults.



UC San Diego Health estimates cost savings of **\$1,900 per GED ACO patient—** or **\$1.9M annually**

Health's ACO, providing concrete value as part of the larger value-based care strategy. Beyond reducing costs, the reduction of unnecessary admissions also improves hospital-wide throughput challenges, leaving hospital beds for patients with the highest need for hospital admission.

### Accelerating Research and Innovation

SECU's GENIE consults have reduced patients' risk of admission by 13% overall and 15% for GED accountable care organization (ACO) patients. These avoided admissions have also resulted in an estimated cost savings of \$1,900 per GED ACO patient—or \$1.9M annually—for UC San Diego

Continuing the charge of innovation and excellence in care, the SECU continues to focus on population health needs through a special transition program called Home. SECU's Home is leveraging their GED resources to identify high risk patients and connect them with Population Health staff who screen them. Where appropriate, patients are enrolled in the program that provides care in their home instead of in the hospital. The pilot phase of Home achieved additional success in lowering hospital admissions and overall costs of care while providing a safe alternative to inpatient care and avoiding prolonged observational stays. SECU will continue expanding this program to accept more diagnoses with a variety of video visits and home health rounding.



#### FEATURES INCLUDE:

- **Nursing station** visible from all patient rooms
- **Patient toilets situated adjacent to staff work areas** to better monitor patient use and needs
- **Brighter lights as well as large, clear signage** and artwork to make it easy to find the way around
- **Variable room lighting and window treatments** that orient patients to the actual time of day
- **Color-contrasting walls, floors and furniture** to lessen visual confusion and lower fall risk
- **Nonslip flooring** to protect against falls
- **Sound-absorbing walls** to minimize ambient noise
- **Quieter alarms, pagers and other equipment** to keep noise levels low and minimize potential anxiety in patients
- **Hearing-aid, visual-assist and mobility devices**
- **Thick mattresses** to enhance comfort and reduce pressure and friction on the body
- **Recliners** to help patients change position, as needed, and improve mobility
- **Private lounge** for loved ones and caregivers to relax



For all of us that have aging parents, we know how important this really is. It hits close to the heart, I think, for all of us, that we could create a situation where our family—our mothers and fathers—can come in and get the kind of care they can get in our geriatric EDs.”

**PATTY MAYSENT**  
UC San Diego Health CEO

## Leading Training and Development for California Hospitals

With the SECU leading the way for geriatric emergency care improvements in the California, when it came time to scale the GED movement throughout the state as part of Governor Newsom’s Master Plan for Aging, the SECU was best positioned to train and educate additional emergency departments. Starting with University of California’s other flagship hospitals, SECU clinical leaders are touching the lives of millions of older adults in California through outreach and training for EDs statewide. To date, UC San Diego Health’s Drs. James Killeen and Vaishal Tolia have trained over 50 individual hospitals with countless other efforts to facilitate improvements in geriatric emergency medicine. This leadership exemplifies the legacy that the SECU will have on the patients and community it serves—in San Diego and through the state—embodying UC’s mission to serve all Californians.

## Leading the charge, elevating standards of care.



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UC San Diego Health is a shining example, which demonstrates that geriatric emergency care improvements are an essential element of value-based care and a strategy to improve hospital efficiency and throughput in the care of older adults. Through their ongoing efforts to provide high impact quality care, excel in research and innovation, and provide leadership in training and development of new GEDs through California’s Master Plan for Aging, UC San Diego Health continues to set new standards for what is possible in improvements for geriatric care in the ED.



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