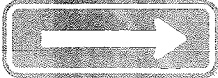
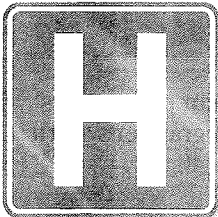


Extending care



Hospitals offer families dealing with serious illness help with everyday errands

By **AYMAR JEAN**
ajejan@ajc.com

After 21 years of marriage, arguments over household duties were rare in the Makover residence. But when Stanford Makover was hospitalized with terminal lung cancer last August, the balance of duties changed drastically.

For Maxine Makover, juggling tasks like grocery shopping and car maintenance has become more of a burden without her husband's help.

"The entire responsibility falls to the person who is well," said Maxine Makover, 61, of Buckhead.

So when Piedmont Hospital inaugurated its errand-running service, Makover immediately took advantage.

Most recently, the Makovers' son and daughter-in-law signed up for a leukemia and lymphoma charity triathlon in honor of Stanford, and Maxine called on a concierge to make copies of pledge cards for family members.

"The service they offer just helps when you've got more things to do, and you can't do one more thing," she said. "And you can't ask one more family member to do it."

In January, Piedmont became one of a small but growing number of hospitals to offer a "concierge" or errand service for its patients — most hospitals only offer it to

► Please see **CONCIERGE, E5**

► **ALSO INSIDE:** Atlanta area hospitals that offer extended services, **E5**



T. LEVETTE BAGWELL / Staff

Barbara Cochran, a concierge at Piedmont Hospital, walks a dog for a client at the hospital.

employees. Piedmont's service is provided by 2 Places at 1 Time, a 13-year-old Atlanta-based company. Hospital officials across the country view such services as a tool to woo patients in an increasingly competitive market.

Some other local hospitals, including DeKalb Medical Center and Emory University Hospital, also offer variations of the service.

Piedmont's concierge service, located in the hospital's front lobby, performs almost any manageable task requested by a patient or his family. Makover has hired a concierge to buy groceries and send out cards — others have asked concierges to walk their dogs, pick up dry cleaning, water plants, collect newspapers and even supervise the installation of a household wheelchair ramp.

"It's been slow, but it's definitely been picking up," said Marilyn Head, vice president of patient advocacy for Piedmont Healthcare, who oversees the contract work by 2 Places at 1 Time. The company charges \$5 an hour plus any incidental costs.

So far the service has received about 100 official requests and hundreds of other informal requests that don't require payment, such as calling for cabs.

For years, various companies have offered concierge services, but most have provided it to employees only. Hospitals are new to the business, and concierge companies say they are becoming increasingly desirable clients.

Best Upon Request, a 16-year-old concierge company, has acquired all of its hospital business in the past four years, mostly in the Midwest. All 13 of its hospitals now offer some form of errand service to their patients.

At Atlanta Medical Center, concierges will aid with errands like dry cleaning but rarely leave the hospital complex. All arrangements are done more or less by phone — so dog walking and other tasks are not included. The situation is similar at Emory and the Shepherd Center in Buckhead.

"They're really more of a personal extender, a kind of personal assistant," said Tony Whalum, regional operations manager for AVP, the company that handles the service at Atlanta Medical Center.

For the past few weeks, Oscar and Melrose Franklin have considered AVP's personal assistant to be a virtual tour guide to Atlanta.

Their 25-year-old son is an ICU patient at Atlanta Medical Center. He's recovering from injuries sustained when his 18-wheeler careened off I-20 earlier this month, sending him through the windshield.

The displaced Houston couple do not know the area, so a concierge provides bus schedules and directions to restaurants and banks and helps them pay their bills. "Any questions that we ask — they help us," said Melrose, 52. "It eases our mind as to how to get around."

Concierge services, as varied as those at Piedmont and Atlanta Medical, have grown rapidly over the past decade as hospitals have realized the importance of enticing customers, according to hospital and industry representatives.

"They're really designed to make the patient say, 'Wow, I'm going to go there,'" American Hospital Association



T. LEVETTE BAGWELL / Staff

Barbara Cochran, a concierge at Piedmont Hospital, picks up dry cleaning for a client at the hospital. Cochran is a representative of 2 Places at 1 Time, a concierge company that provides the service at Piedmont.

AREA HOSPITALS OFFERING SERVICES

Piedmont Hospital

- **Staff:** Two contracted errand runners are available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- **Cost:** \$5 each hour, unless request is research-related, then the first hour is free. Patient pays for incidental costs like the dry cleaning bill.
- **Services include:** Food shopping, dog walking, picking up dry cleaning — on-site and off-site.
- **Adopted:** January
- **Additional info:** If both runners are busy, calls roll over to 2 Places' headquarters. Concierges are then paged.

Atlanta Medical Center downtown

- **Staff:** Contracted concierges available from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- **Cost:** Free
- **Services include:** Ordering flowers, providing restaurant directions, calling in pet groomers.
- **Adopted:** Full service in January.

DeKalb Medical Center

- **Staff:** 11 hospital employees acting as patient ambassadors
- **Cost:** Free
- **Services include:** Taking patient complaints.
- **Adopted:** January

Emory University Hospital

- **Staff:** Guest services department available from 6:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. seven days a week.
- **Cost:** Free
- **Services include:** Delivering newspapers to patients, arranging on-site grooming services, booking hotel reservations.

Shepherd Center in Buckhead

- **Staff:** Volunteer and family services departments from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.
- **Cost:** Free
- **Services include:** Suggesting hotels with cheap rates, where to get groceries, etc.
- **Additional services:** Driving customers to post office, barbershop, etc.

spokesman Rick Wade said. "We're getting into consumer-driven health care."

Because of the wide variety of concierge services offered at hospitals, the association does not keep records on the number of its constituents offering them but has observed their increasing popularity.

Competition with other hospitals played a role in Piedmont's decision to adopt the program.

"You want to do something that sets you apart from other hospitals," said Head. "But the main thing you do is make the stay as painless as possible for [patients] and their families."

Patients, often older and sometimes living alone, look for a place that "helps them feel secure and speeds the healing process," Wade said.

Demographically, people are marrying later in life and more often living alone — especially

in urban and suburban areas — and may need these services to keep their lives in order, Wade added. As the baby boomers start retiring in a few years, hospitals will be seeing a bigger, and more fickle, customer base, he said.

Andrea Novakoski, president and founder of 2 Places at 1 Time, said that while it is seeing more interest among hospitals, "Piedmont is a bit revolutionary in that they are offering it to patients."

Errand runners will provide lunch for visitors who would rather not leave the bedside of their sick loved ones. Once, an Atlantan had a hankering for some Southern ribs. The concierge drove across town to a small, unassuming rib joint in southwest Atlanta to get them.

"If someone says, 'How was your stay at Piedmont?' I bet they're going to say, 'they got me the best ribs,'" she said.

Maxine Makover (center), who uses concierge services at Piedmont Hospital, talks with concierges Barbara Cochran (left) and Erin Campbell.



LOUIE FAVORITE / Staff