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California's First Accredited Geriatric Emergency Department Arrives in La Jolla

UC San Diego Health's Gary and Mary West Emergency Department is one of eight emergency departments in nation to receive accreditation

The Gary and Mary West Emergency Department at UC San Diego Health in La Jolla has been accredited as a geriatric emergency department by the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). The accreditation is the first of its kind and is part of an effort to improve the quality and standards of emergency care provided to the nation's older patients. It builds upon the foundational work and support of the Gary and Mary West Health Institute and The John A. Hartford Foundation to enhance geriatric emergency care across the country.

"This recognition is an acknowledgement of the superior, tailored care we provide to any senior who arrives in our emergency department," said Vaishal Tolia, MD, MPH, medical director of the Emergency Department at UC San Diego Health and director of the Gary and Mary West Senior Emergency Care Unit at Jacobs Medical Center. "Our comprehensive, team-based approach is what makes us so successful in caring for older adults."



UC San Diego Health was recently accredited by the American College of Emergency Physicians.

"We're very pleased the Gary and Mary West Emergency Department at UC San Diego Health is leading the way in California as the first-in-the-state to be accredited by ACEP in recognition of its commitment to delivering high-quality geriatric care," said Shelley Lyford, president and CEO of the West Health Institute. "There is a tremendous opportunity to catalyze broader adoption of senior-appropriate acute care models so every older adult across the nation has access to emergency care tailored to their needs."

The ACEP accreditation requires hospital emergency departments to have both physicians and nurses on staff with specialized geriatric training, meet specific environmental criteria, such as ensuring easy patient access to water and mobility aids, and implement a geriatric quality

improvement program.

UC San Diego Health received a Level 1 designation — the highest and most comprehensive level.

Seniors who arrive in the emergency department at Jacobs Medical Center in La Jolla are treated by a team of specialists in geriatric medicine. At the center of this care unit are specialized geriatric nurses, physicians, pharmacists and social workers. As a group, they focus on senior-specific issues, such as fall risk, cognitive and memory problems and medication interactions — all common complications when treating older adults. Additionally, the team tries to lower hospital admissions and re-admissions for seniors as well as working with patients and caretakers to ensure a smooth transition home.

The U.S. Census notes that by 2029, the entire baby boomer demographic group will be 65 or older. More than 21.3 million patients over the age of 65 were treated in emergency rooms in 2015, according to the latest available statistics from the [National Hospital Ambulatory Medical Care Survey \(PDF\)](#), up from about 16 million in 2001. Those numbers are expected to continue to rise. Studies in the *Annals of Emergency Medicine* cite increased health vulnerability in older adults after an emergency visit, typically related to the illness or injury that required emergency care.

“Every day, more and more baby boomers turn 65, making seniors one of the largest populations of patients impacting the health care system,” said Ted Chan, MD, chair of the Department of Emergency Medicine at UC San Diego School of Medicine. “We’re excited that our dedication to this population has been recognized and look forward to many more years of building the best geriatric emergency department in California.”

Gary and Mary West provided an \$11.8 million grant through their foundation to UC San Diego Health to create the state-of-the-art Gary and Mary West Emergency Department at Jacobs Medical Center in La Jolla, where specialized geriatric care has been available since the hospital opened in 2016. It will soon offer senior-specific exam rooms and observation bays in the Gary and Mary West Senior Emergency Care Unit. Additionally, the Gary and Mary West Foundation’s grant enables research initiatives between UC San Diego Health and the West Health Institute to identify, evaluate, and disseminate best practices in geriatric emergency care.

About West Health

Solely funded by philanthropists Gary and Mary West, West Health includes the nonprofit and nonpartisan Gary and Mary West Health Institute and the Gary and Mary West Health Policy Center in Washington, D.C. These organizations are working together toward a shared mission dedicated to enabling seniors to successfully age in place with access to high-quality, affordable health and support services that preserve and protect their dignity, quality of life and independence. For more information, visit westhealth.org and follow @westhealth.

About The John A. Hartford Foundation

The John A. Hartford Foundation, based in New York City, is a private, nonpartisan, national philanthropy dedicated to improving the care of older adults. For more than three decades, the organization has been the leader in building a field of experts in aging and testing and replicating innovative approaches to care. The Foundation has three areas of emphasis: creating age-friendly health systems, supporting family caregivers, and improving serious illness and end-of-life care. Working with its grantees, the Foundation strives to change the status quo and create a society where older adults can continue their vital contributions. For more information, visit johnahartford.org and follow @johnahartford.

MEDIA CONTACT

Gabrielle Johnston, 858-249-0456, gnjohnston@ucsd.edu

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