From left: Dr. Jocelyn Wiggins, Turner Geriatric Clinic Director, nurse Georgia Hazlett, and Dr. Caroline Blaum in the reception area of the Turner Geriatric Clinic’s new East Ann Arbor location.
**A New Home, a New Perspective**

They spent all year planning for it, preparing for it, anticipating it. And finally, in October, the day came. After eight years in the same location, the U-M Geriatrics Center’s clinics, including the Turner Geriatric Clinic, moved to their new home in northeast Ann Arbor.

The opening of the new space at the East Ann Arbor Health and Geriatrics Center gives patients and their families, faculty, staff and trainees a friendly and accessible place for some of the nation’s most admired geriatric care, research and education.

From the grandfather clock that presides over the waiting room to the team-based approach to treating older patients, the Center’s ambulatory care programs made a seamless transition from their previous home in the building shared with the Comprehensive Cancer Center. Even the valet parking came along.

But the move also gave the entire Geriatrics team a chance to take new approaches, to develop novel programs, and to get a fresh perspective on all their activities. Now, and into 2007 and beyond, these innovations promise to improve patients’ care; enhance the training of medical students, residents and fellows; and make the most of faculty members’ expertise and time.

All of this becomes clear on a tour of the new facilities with clinic director Jocelyn Wiggins, BM, BCh. She and her team proudly show off the cheery exam rooms decorated with paintings and photos created by local seniors, the bustling physicians’ room where faculty from many disciplines interact with each other and with trainees, and the phone stations where nurses and others guide patients through the complex task of coping with multiple medical conditions at once.

Another feature throughout the clinic: technology that streamlines each patient’s visit. Medical assistants can now take patients’ vital signs and measurements and enter them directly into a computer, instantly making them part of the patient’s medical record. Physicians can pull up those records, and print prescriptions, clinical trial handouts and health information for each patient, using the terminals and printers in each exam room. Pharmacists and pharmacy students who interview patients about their use of medications and supplements can quickly point out possible interactions and opportunities to physicians.

Even the private consultation rooms where social workers address patients’ and families’ needs—whether it’s handrails for the bath or help paying for prescriptions—have computers to speed access to the information and resources they need. And the physical therapist can instruct patients on the exercises they need to do at home to regain or maintain their physical function.

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But as high-tech as the new location is, its real strength lies in the combined expertise of the physicians, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, physical therapists, trainees and staff who work there. The Geriatrics Center’s faculty lead an experienced and dedicated team of health care providers and staff, which also includes pharmacist Tami Remington, PharmD, several nurse practitioners and a social work group led by Darlene Racz, MSW, LMSW, Associate Director of Social Work and Community Programs.

As they planned for the move to the new location, the Geriatrics team evaluated how the primary care program’s services are organized, and designed changes that will improve care and accountability. Beginning in mid-2007, patients will be assigned to one of several teams, each one led by a designated faculty member and made up of physicians, nurses, pharmacists and social workers who will take collective responsibility for each patient’s care.

This year also brought the launch of a new service for a specific and very vulnerable population of older adults: those who are heading home from the nursing home, sub-acute care facility, or hospital—especially after a catastrophic incident such as a fall or emergency operation. Through a new “transitional care” program, Geriatrics team members can make special assessments of patients’ physical and emotional health, prescription drug needs, and ability to care for themselves. The program may actually help prevent future hospitalizations, and also gives medical residents an eye-opening new perspective on post-acute care.
As before, the Geriatrics Center offers access to customized specialty care. For those patients who need advanced care for movement and memory disorders, depression, diabetes, wounds, and other conditions, the new clinic offers the chance to be seen by specialists from Neurology, Psychiatry, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, and the Internal Medicine subspecialties of Gastroenterology, Infectious Disease, Rheumatology and Metabolism, Endocrinology & Diabetes.

Having these specialists close at hand means that geriatricians can easily consult on a particular patient’s care—or even arrange a spontaneous examination for urgent matters.

Patients aren’t the only ones who benefit from this critical mass of knowledge and expertise. For the medical students and residents who rotate through the clinic, and the students of social work and pharmacy who also receive part of their training here, the new clinic offers the chance to learn from one of the best geriatrics teams in the country. Patients even take an active role in trainees’ education, not hesitating to give advice or constructive criticism.

The new location also gives patients ready access to a wide array of other outpatient diagnostic and treatment facilities on the growing East Medical Campus. Within the same building, patients can get blood samples taken for lab tests, pick up their prescriptions at the pharmacy, and attend stop-smoking classes and other group sessions.

Just steps away, they can schedule bone density exams, mammograms, advanced MRI and CT scans, colonoscopies, minor operations and biopsies, and even drug and alcohol treatment at two new U-M buildings that opened this year: the East Ann Arbor Ambulatory Surgery and Medical Procedures Center, and the Rachel Upjohn Building/Depression Center.