

As number of seniors rise, so do careers in aging

When talking about the future of nursing and the number of aging patients, “silver tsunami” is the term Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing’s magazine uses in a spring 2011 article.

Call it what you will, but the number of retirement-age seniors is growing, creating a demand for careers in aging.

According to statistics from the Administration on Aging, “the older population – persons 65 years or older – numbered 39.6 million in 2009.” That figure is expected to grow to 72.1 million by 2030.

Janet Roberts, academic program coordinator for the Johns Hopkins University Odyssey Program, is aware of this and has seen enrollment in the Certificate on Aging program continue to rise.

The Certificate on Aging has been in place since fall 1995 and was developed with the assistance of an advisory board of professionals working in the field of aging who continue to meet twice a year to keep the program relevant and current. Roberts said most of the students enrolled are professionals working with aging populations either in the medical field, as social workers, as clergy, as estate planners, etc. Some take the courses as a result of being a caregiver.

The program’s four required courses examine the biology, psychology and sociology of aging, and public and private programs available for the elderly.

“Students say the information is very hands on – information they can immediately take back to the workplace and apply,” Roberts said.

She said in the classroom, students are sharing information from their various workplaces, enriching the learning experience.

“I think many students begin taking the program to learn about how the aging

process affects others in their personal or professional lives, and often find that the information applies to them personally as well,” said Roberts. “We all want to be empowered to age as gracefully as possible and maintain the best possible quality of life.”

Having the best possible quality of life is part of what inspired Judy Armstrong to begin working with seniors a decade ago.

“It’s rewarding to me to see the lifestyle change and to see them benefit from all the services offered by the community,” said Armstrong, who is marketing director for Symphony Manor Assisted Living and Memory Care in Roland Park. “They are engaging with residents and joining in activities.”

Armstrong is heavily involved in the move-in process, helping to make the transition as easy and less stressful as possible.

“The biggest challenge is getting them to come in while they’re still feeling well, and not waiting until the crisis happens,” she said.

Her parents moved into a community together, and she saw firsthand the socialization they had in an environment with other seniors, where they could share meals and activities together. When her father passed away, her mother was able to have the support of the community.

Armstrong said careers in aging at Symphony Manor range from medical technicians and registered nurses to office managers and those working in marketing.

“I feel it’s the best job because you have the opportunity to change someone’s life,” Armstrong said. “I think a lot of people are waiting too long to begin this time of life.”

For more information on the Johns Hopkins Odyssey Certificate on Aging, visit odyssey.jhu.edu/certificate-on-aging.