

BEST OF TIMES ARTICLES:

John Patrick Segale, Johnson County Commissioner

February 2006 ([Johnson County Human Services and Aging](#) monthly newsletter)

"As I See It" - Recently I had the opportunity to learn about an exciting and innovative program initiated by the leadership of the Johnson County Nursing Center. The Geriatric Education Research Training Institute (GERTI) was created from the professional knowledge of the nursing center leaders. GERTI uses the real world demands and experiences involved in operating Johnson County's own nursing center. At one time the nursing center was entirely part of Johnson County government. Today the nursing center operates as a non-profit agency supported with a cash subsidy and in-kind use of county facilities, which has assisted in the development of GERTI.

GERTI is designed to train workers in assisted living communities and nursing home facilities, whether operated as for profit or non-profit entities. Through GERTI training workers in every facet of service are trained to be caregivers, from employees in the laundry room to nurses assistants. The technical and soft skills obtained in GERTI training promise to improve the quality of care the residents of assisted living communities receive. Additionally, trained caregivers enjoy a higher level of job satisfaction, which results in reduced employee turnover and thus reduced expenditures for employee orientation and other hiring costs. The Johnson County Nursing Center's financial future and quality of care will be improved with more satisfied and productive employees.

Unfortunately elder abuse is an issue in assisted living communities today. GERTI training is designed to prevent abuse by providing caregivers the necessary skills to avoid abusive situations and cope with frustrations. In addition, the training program helps "weed" out individuals who may be unable to handle the demands of the assisted living environment. GERTI education promises to improve the basic care of residents and also protect them from abuse.

Aside from improving resident care, GERTI serves an important role in what is known as workforce development or worker training which received renewed energy from the welfare to work initiatives in the 1990's. The demand for individuals trained in geriatric care will continue to grow as the US population over 65 doubles in the next 25-years. California recognized the intersection of rising geriatric care and workforce development needs and launched a Caregiver Training Initiative to study and fund effective programs to meet these social and economic needs. Geriatric training for individuals can provide the needed leg up for individuals seeking careers with a future. Entry level caregivers can progress through the care giver profession to achieve well paying nursing or post graduate professional careers. The GERTI program in Johnson County supports the objectives of workforce development and improved assisted care for members of the community which are objectives shared by the Kansas Department of Aging strategic plan.

Although the demand for GERTI services continues to increase, the program is struggling to grow and meet these demands due to the financial challenges inherent to health care providers. Additional financial hurdles are posed by GERTI's existence within the Johnson County Nursing Center, and because it is not recognized as an accredited teaching institution. GERTI also struggles to receive reimbursement for all costs associated with providing the training program. Today approximately 60% of the program costs are covered by tuition. New resources must be developed from federal or state grants or regulatory changes that will support a tuition that covers all costs. In an coordinated effort with county staff, and the staff of GERTI and the nursing center, my fellow Commissioners and I hope to ensure the continued viability and success of GERTI. Current and future efforts include the pursuit of assistance from federal and state leaders through demonstration project funding, regulatory reform and incentives for assisted living providers.

GERTI is the kind of leading edge initiative that we should be both proud and thankful for as Johnson County residents.

Web Resources:

GERTI: please visit their developing web site: www.gerti.info

Kansas Association of Homes and Services for the Aging: www.kahsa.org

Kansas Department on Aging: www.agingkansas.org