Comprehensive care for seniors
New service helps older people cope with lifestyle changes

By MARY PAT MURPHY

A new service being offered at North Valley Hospital is designed to help elderly people and those who care for them successfully navigate the lifestyle changes that aging can bring. North Valley Geriatric Specialties, which opened in January, offers comprehensive assessments for seniors upon referral from their primary care health care professionals. Assessment areas include nutrition, physical therapy, occupational therapy, a psychosocial evaluation with a social worker, as well as medical and pharmaceutical evaluations.

"We'll review the information and identify problems and concerns," said Dr. Linda Hitchcock, a board-certified specialist in gerontology who has extensive experience in caring for elderly patients, both as a general practitioner and in geriatric care. "We'll make a care plan to follow to give back to the primary care doctor."

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DR. LINDA HITCHCOCK, NORTH VALLEY GERIATRIC SPECIALTIES

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Hitchcock and her husband, Fred, the operations manager at North Valley Geriatric Specialties, relocated to Whitefish from Texas, where Hitchcock was director of the division of geriatrics at the Scott and White Health Center.

“Our goal is to keep people as healthy and functional as possible with the best quality of life in the living situation they’re in,” she said.

Sometimes the recommended changes may be something as simple as adding a walker for stability. In other cases, the assessment may find that a person can no longer live on their own or should stop driving.

“We will bring the patient back with family members to go over recommendations and encourage them to follow up with their primary care doctor,” Hitchcock said.

People over 65 who have had changing conditions, such as a fall or a hospitalization, are among those who might be referred for a comprehensive evaluation.

“We’re here to help you on your journey,” said Fred Hitchcock.

“We’re here to help you draw the map.”

North Valley Geriatric Specialties is located at 2004 Hospital Way in Whitefish.

For more information on the new service, call 862-1030.