

### An Elder-Friendly Physician Practice

by Ethel Mitty, EdD, RN and  
Mathy Mezey, EdD, RN, FAAN

(NAPSA)—Older adults should expect their physician and the physician's office staff to be sensitive to and knowledgeable about the care of older adults. Going to the doctor often brings on some anxiety: concern that special needs will be addressed; the anticipation of bad news; the challenge of getting to the office and home again, of getting undressed and dressed. Here's what to look for when seeking an "elder-friendly" physician's practice:

- **Elder-friendly appointment process:** Office personnel will speak in a clear, unhurried voice. You are given necessary information to prepare for the appointment and encouraged to write down information and questions.

- **Elder-friendly office:** The entrance to the building has a safe, accessible drop-off point, a ramp-way with a handrail on at least one side and elevators with easy-to-read floor indicators and doors that stay open long enough to exit safely. Office space and bathrooms easily accommodate a wheelchair or walker. Staff offer to assist you to undress. The examining table is easily accessed and has a side rail to hold onto.

- **Elder-friendly doctor/patient consultation:** An elder-friendly physician will convey that he/she expects that you lead an active and complex life; have concerns about your physical health and age changes, including memory; expect advice about preventing disability and promoting physical and mental health; weigh options and balance benefits and burdens of treatment outcomes; and con-



**Doctors' offices should be suitable for the patients seen there, including seniors.**

sider cost related to medications and other treatments.

At the end of the visit, an elder-friendly physician will ask if you fully understand and agree to the treatment plan related to diagnoses and additional testing; new and ongoing medication and treatments; verbal and written instructions; health prevention options; age changes; and advance directives.

A free booklet from the National Institute on Aging (NIA) describes how you can communicate effectively with your doctor. "Talking With Your Doctor. A Guide for Older People," can be ordered by calling 1-800-222-2225 or via e-mail: [niaic@jbs1.com](mailto:niaic@jbs1.com). The NIA also publishes "Age Pages," on topics such as depression, safe use of medications, accident prevention and more.

To learn more about elder-friendly medical care, contact the John A. Hartford Foundation Institute for Geriatric Nursing at New York University by visiting [www.hartfordign.org](http://www.hartfordign.org).