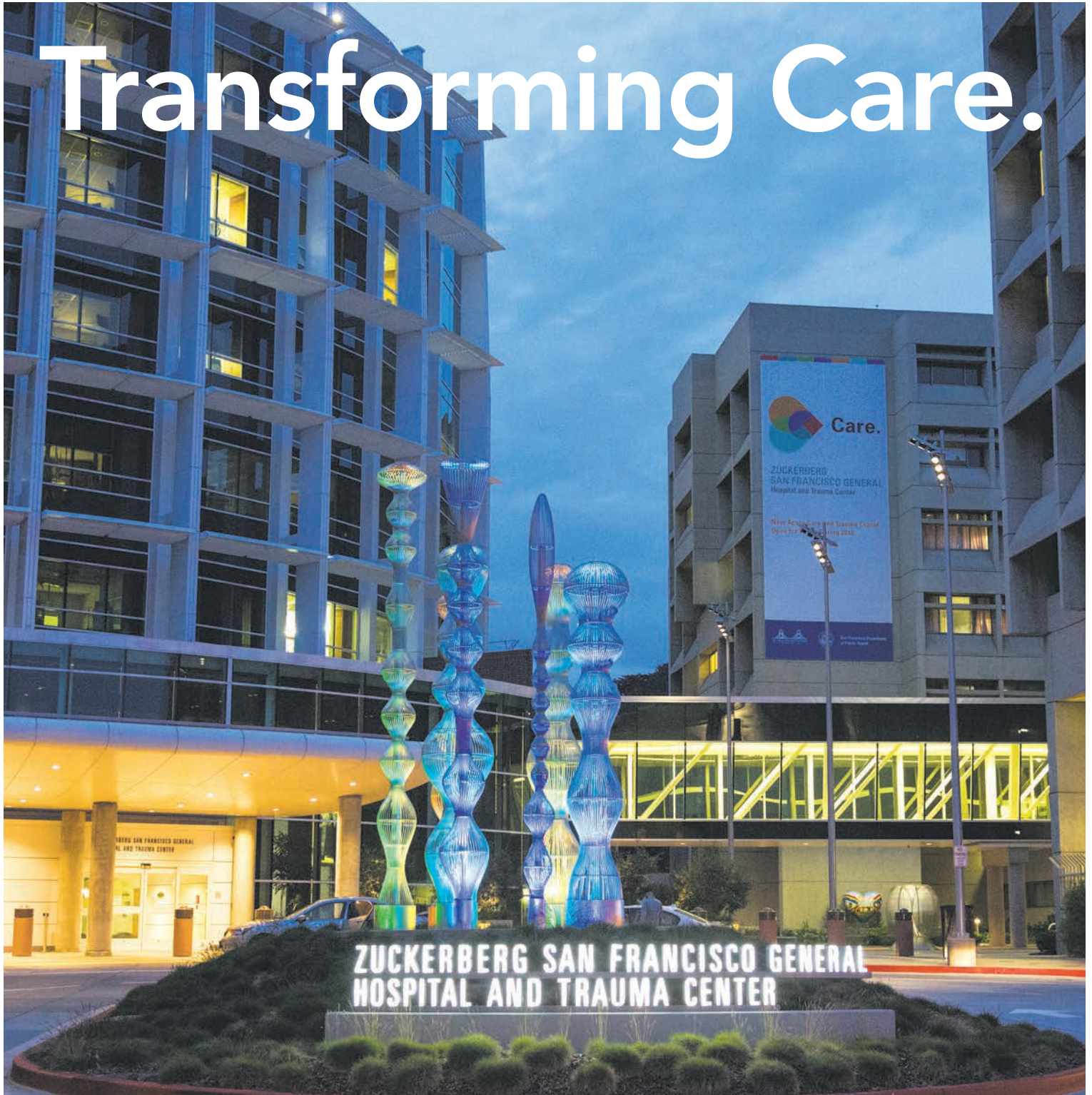


ADVERTISING FEATURE OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE

Transforming Care.





PHOTOS BY LAURA MORTON / SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Edgar Pierluissi, Medical Director of the Acute Care for Elders Unit in the rooftop garden.

ACE Unit helps seniors get back to their lives

By Peggy Spear

The aim of Zuckerberg San Francisco General's Acute Care for Elders (ACE) unit is simple: treat and rehabilitate patients as efficiently and quickly as possible so they can return to active lives in their communities.

But with its soothing envi-

ronment, cheerful, community-oriented staff, state-of-the-art rooms and astounding artwork, patients may just not want to leave.

It is a response to the many hazards older adults face when they are hospitalized.

Things like worsening disability and increased confusion can threaten an older adults

capacity to live independently in the community. These hazards also add significantly to healthcare costs. ACE units have been shown to improve the chances a hospitalized older adult will go home rather than to a nursing home.

The ACE unit occupies the top floor of the new building and offers an enriching rooftop

garden. But besides the physical features, it's the jovial leadership of founder and Medical Director Dr. Edgar Pierluissi that drives the unit, as he has created one of the most unique programs for elderly patients in the U.S.

I've never seen anything like this, Pierluissi said. And I've seen a lot of eldercare

units.

Indeed he has, as he has spent his career—including running the Veterans Affairs Hospital's nursing home—working on how to treat older patients and help them get back home to their lives.

The unit itself welcomes patients and their families with soothing, fall-toned colors that

Pierluissi said helps calm many patients who may be confused or disoriented.

The 32 rooms in the ACE unit — 10 more than in the old building — are spacious and designed with elderly patients in mind, including rails from the beds to the bathroom. Light permeates the entire unit with vast views of the city from almost every room. But if it gets too bright, there are automatic window shades to help control the environment.

It helps with dehydration if the patients get too hot, Pierluissi said. But he adds that increased exposure to natural light helps patients who are disoriented, and also regulates regular sleep patterns.

Besides sleep, eating is an important component of care in the ACE unit. Staff works with each patient to get them moving, out of their beds, if possible, and have them eat sitting up in a social setting. There is now a larger community dining room where patients can gather for meals and boasts a sprawling view of the city.

It's wonderful to see the community that develops, Pierluissi said. Sometimes there are many different languages spoken here but that doesn't seem to stop patients from bonding with each other. And, ultimately that sense of community helps healing.

In fact, views and aesthetics are an important part of the new ACE unit. It is centered by the shimmering blue-green-colored stained-glass windows at the entrance to the unit, designed by renowned stained-glass artist Alan Masaoka.

My thoughts on what inspired me were from my walks along the local Carmel Valley River and how the flow and reflective light revitalized me, and how it was very healing experience, Masaoka said.

So I found it was a very natural theme for my windows. My hope was that they would create a moment of reflection and peace. And that this creative gift would last well beyond my years.

The artwork on the unique rooftop garden is also de-



Above: Stained-glass artist Alan Masaoka created *River of Time*, a piece displayed at the entrance of the ACE Unit. **Below:** Artist Masayuki Nagase created hand-carved granite boulders that are installed in the garden, including *Breath Between Sky and Ocean*.

signed to bring peace. Artist Masayuki Nagase designed a series of hand-carved granite boulders, sculptural benches and pavers that are installed throughout the garden, connected by arching paths.

I wanted the artwork to offer a restful and restorative experience for the patients and their families and the Zuckerberg San Francisco General staff, Nagase said. The garden itself provides a space where patients can stroll or sit in wheelchairs and enjoy the views of the Golden Gate Bridge and the Marin

Headlands.

Boredom is common in hospitals, Pierluissi said. This type of environment helps alleviate that.

Pierluissi estimates there are approximately 250 ACE units in the United States and the number is growing. The one he has run for 10 years was the first in California and the second on the West Coast. He says they are now springing up at other hospitals, including UCSF, Veterans Affairs and Kaiser to meet the growing demand of caring for frail older adults who are at risk.



ACE UNIT POINT IN HISTORY

2007

In February, the hospital launched its Acute Care for Elders Unit, the first ACE unit in California.

The unit was developed to combat declines in cognitive and physical health that many older adults go through after hospitalization. The ACE unit

offers inpatient care specifically tailored to the needs of older adults.

For example, older patients at Zuckerberg San Francisco General participate in programs specifically to maintain and improve their cognitive function in addition to their physical health.

Now, the ACE Unit features a rooftop garden where patients can relax and heal.



PHOTO BY ARLA ESCONTRIAS