First, the study provides Villagers with an important health benefit, Klasko said.

The information Villagers provide to USF Health researchers will be available not only to the individual through a password-protected Internet portal, but also their physician – in an effort to provide participants with data designed to help them live healthier and happier lives longer, Klasko said.

Second, Villagers may be giving the world a gift in the form of confidential demographic health data that explains their longevity and how, perhaps, an active adult lifestyle enhances that longevity, Klasko said.

To accomplish this goal, researchers will rely heavily on patient-centered electronic record-keeping, according to Dr. Elliot Sussman, professor of medicine at USF’s College of Medicine and immediate past president and CEO of Lehigh Valley Health Network.

“Stephen and I have talked a lot about connectivity and the importance of that,” Sussman said. “And that connectivity we’ve been talking about is Villagers to USF, Villagers to their existing physicians, Villagers to each other, to learn from each other, and to do that increasingly electronically.”

Early indications of the computer literacy in The Villages encourages Sussman.

“We talked about how computer literate so many of the folks here are, and then think about the traditional doctor’s office,” Sussman said. “Computers? Are you kidding? It’s a paper chart. And it exists only in one place at one time. Well, that’s not a way to get connectivity.”

Instead of physician-centered record-keeping, Sussman said, the goal of this study is to create patient-centered record-keeping.

“So much of this is going to be putting in the electronic infrastructure that, in fact, gets all this personal information that’s owned by each one of the Villagers, their data about doctors that they’ve seen, hospitals that they’ve gone to, medicines that they’re on and making that available to them,” Sussman said. “That’s going to be key.”

Results of this confidential endeavor could provide the foundation for important public policy changes, Klasko said.

“When you think about the health care crisis now, part of it is that fragmentation,” Klasko said.

“Take for example, Klasko said, a diabetes patient treated by half a dozen or so different physicians.

“Well, most places, those doctors have different charts that don’t connect,” Klasko said. “They don’t talk to each other, and about 50 percent of the patients did get the minimum stuff they should get because they were talking to different people.”

That is why the USF College of Medicine now relies on collaborative education that actually integrates students studying medicine, nursing, public health and pharmacology through core clinical classes.

“At USF, we’ve actually connected everybody through a single record, Klasko said. “We call it Paper-Free Florida. The private docs, the full-time docs are all connected through a single record. So, literally, we know everything about you.”

In its ideal form, Klasko said, the concept of connectivity also follows patients wherever they go.

“You could be in Pennsylvania, you get sick and we can take care of you there,” Klasko said. “And you leave our office with a little flash drive. It has all your records, including your MRIs.

“So, if you’re skiing someplace, and you get hurt, and (treating physicians) say, ‘Boy, if I only could see what the other MRI looked like three weeks ago,’” Klasko said. “It could be a Sunday, (and) I can say, ‘I have it right here.’ Or, actually I have it in the cloud (a remote computer server). We’re one of the first places in the country that’s done that, and we’re basically going to offer that to The Villages.”

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USF-Villages health partnership breaks new ground

The word connectivity took on almost a mantra-like quality among the USF Health leadership in its goal to transform The Villages into America’s Healthiest Hometown.

Within a month or so, USF Health physicians and researchers will embark on this unparalleled initiative to enhance the lives of Villagers, learn from the experience and then not only tell the world about it but also provide demographic health data designed to help others live just as healthy lives, said Dr. Stephen Klasko, dean of the USF College of Medicine and chief executive officer of USF Health.

“It’ll be where we start to connect people,” Klasko said.

In the coming months, USF Health researchers will enroll Villagers into a double-blind health study that will capitalize on the unique and diverse origination of The Villages’ population, Klasko said. Residents come from all over the world, he noted.

Two great expectations evolved quickly about what may be the largest health study of its kind, Klasko said.

“We think this is the first opportunity for a community of this size that’s connecting that’s getting together with a university for the sole purpose of making the citizens healthier, happier and living longer,” Klasko said. “So, the goal will be to say this is where you are now, because of this partnership, you’ll live longer, healthier, and we think that will make you happier.”

See HEALTH, A7

It’s already known The Villages lifestyle makes winners out of those who stay active, like pickleball players Bob Fox and Jean Kiker. Now comes news that a new partnership between The Villages and USF Health will provide greater enhancements when it comes residents’ health care, thus giving them the tools to be healthier and happier.