Senior Mood Improvement through Lifestyle and Education (SMILE)

Researchers estimate that about twenty percent of community-dwelling older persons experience symptoms of depression. Seniors are even more at risk of depression because of inevitable declining health, personal loss and isolation.

Fortunately there is hope. The majority of seniors diagnosed with depression respond favorably to medication and counseling. Support groups, socialization groups, and other therapy groups can also be helpful. Aging Futures has recognized that depression is a significant health problem and has initiated a special program to address these needs.

This program is called SMILE and consists of two parts. The first part focuses on screening for well-being and depression, and the second focuses on offering a six-session, cognitive-behavioral intervention for those seniors who exhibit symptoms of depression. Most participants, when retested with the Geriatric Depression Screen, showed improvement in depressive symptoms.

Two geriatric social workers from the Family and Children's Society work with seniors to reconnect them with pleasurable activities that will improve their mood. For example, seniors who were once active may now feel depressed because they can't get out into a garden since they have relocated to a high rise apartment without a yard. After talking with the counselor and setting goals as outlined in the program, another option – that of starting a garden in the community room – could be pursued.

Rick Spencer is one of the counselors. He states that, "Each visit is based on client needs. I offer encouragement. Relocation is just one stressor; others include chronic health conditions, loss of a spouse or friend, or financial problems. Some folks appreciate a 'kick-start'. We look at their accomplishments and build self esteem; many show improvement quickly."

Rick and another counselor, Liz Strong, start by providing seniors with a packet of information about depression and resources available to cope with it. They also talk about how to monitor symptoms and communicate more effectively with the healthcare provider. Each session has different goals and at the conclusion of the program, participants all agreed that the visits from the counselors were the program's "best part".

Being able to talk about life's stressors with their counselors and explore solutions for coping, helped relieve symptoms of depression for the majority of participants.

Currently, the SMILE program will focus on working with seniors in Broome County congregate housing units. To date, screenings have been conducted at 110 Chenango Street, the Marian Apartments, and the Wells Apartments. Next, residents at Lincoln Court will also receive this service.

Calendar Wins Award

***Congratulations* to the Social Connections Workgroup for their efforts on the 2006** *Stay Connected – Stay Well* **calendar. It received a Merit Award in the community organizations division from the Mature Market Resource Center, a national clearinghouse for the senior market.**

Aging Futures
c/o Broome County Office for Aging
PO Box 1766
Binghamton, NY 13902-1766
Phone: (607) 778-2411 • Fax: (607) 778-2316

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Livable Communities Make Possible Aging in Place

"The vast majority of older Americans prefer to remain in their own homes and 'age in place.' Many factors influence a person's ability to age in place. They include access to health and supportive services, the quality of the environment, community walkability, safety, access to transportation and housing options, and availability of other critical services such as grocery stores and pharmacies. Taken together these factors constitute the characteristics of a livable community."

In the spring, a Livable Communities Workgroup will be formed to assess how livable our communities are. The workgroup will use a national evaluation tool available from AARP. *It will discuss how to partner with those who are working on economic development issues. Other topics might include transportation and housing services and civic engagement opportunities. If you are interested in participating, contact Joan at* 778-6145.

In 2005 U.S. Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina Carbonell made that statement prior to congratulating communities that represent outstanding examples of at least one area of the "Livable Communities model." Congratulations to Broome County CASA for winning the competition for its Nursing Home-to-Community program which helps short-term residents of all ages move out of nursing homes and into independent living arrangements in the community.

The Administration on Aging (AoA) sponsored the program and developed the following categories for their "Livable Communities" competition.

- Providing affordable, appropriate, accessible housing
- Adjusting the physical environments for inclusiveness and accessibility
- Ensuring access to key health and supportive services
- Ensuring accessible, affordable, reliable, and safe transportation
- Providing work, volunteer, and education opportunities
- Encouraging participation in civic, cultural, social, and recreational activities

AARP is another national organization interested in Livable Communities. Their criteria focus on three areas of concern and they overlap with the AoA criteria. "A livable community is one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life." (Beyond 50.05: A Report to the Nation on Livable Communities: Creating Environments for Successful Aging; AARP)

The Livable Community concept is about quality of life. Broome County already offers residents more choices for arts, education, sports and services than many communities its size. Aging Futures hopes that upcoming discussions about Broome County's future growth and change will include livability for older adults.

There's No Place Like Home

2007 Home Show
Friday, March 9, 2:00pm - 8:00pm
Saturday, March 10, 10:00am - 8:00pm
Sunday, March 11, 10:00am - 4:00pm
BC Veterans Memorial Arena

Aging Futures is working with the Southern Tier Home Builders and Remodelers Association to coordinate seminars that will appeal to consumers/seniors who are planning on building or remodeling a home. The seminars will show how universal design and energy efficient building products can make homes more livable and will enable people to remain independent in their home as they age. More information on universal design will be available at the Aging Futures booth on all three days of the show.

Seminars will be offered on Saturday, March 10 around the theme of Home Design for a Lifetime. Pre-registration is encouraged. You may register by calling Action for Older Persons at 722-1251. Workshops will last approximately 30 minutes.

Topics will include:

- How To Choose a Contractor
- Home Design for a Lifetime (Universal Design)
- Reverse Mortgages
- How to Downsize to Smaller Space
- Building Green

Special thanks to Ann McNichols who is coordinating this effort on behalf of Aging Futures and to all the other committee members working so hard to promote Livable Communities.

Small Groups Work on Big Issues

Elder Friendly Communities

The availability of appropriate housing options significantly influences a senior's ability to remain independent. As part of her commitment to Elder Friendly Communities, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo is spearheading action in the housing area. She has gathered municipalities, businesses, agencies and the Southern Tier Home Builders and Remodelers Association to talk about specific housing issues.

The group met with the Council of Governments to discuss housing needs and zoning laws. The group will help with training that is required for local planning boards. (Our participation at the Home Show (see page 1) is a result of these talks.) The group will continue to meet as an ad hoc committee of the Aging Futures Partnership.

Senior Transportation Workgroup Releases Report

Most seniors rely on private vehicles for transportation, yet men are expected to live six years past the point where they stop driving and women an average of 10 years. A workgroup, co-chaired by Joanne Kays and Jack Salo, met for seven months to review local services and research programs and services that could offer seniors more mobility options. They released a report this month offering short and long term recommendations. For a copy call 778-6145.

Thanks go to Jack Salo and Joanne Kays for their leadership and to Jo Ann Freer, Neil Eldred and all the partners who offered support and insight.

Both of these groups are assisting Aging Futures in responding to the Strategic Plan released in 2003.

Caregivers Benefit from Support, Information and Referrals

- ***More than 50 million people provide care during any given year for a chronically ill, disabled, or aged family member.***
- ***30% of family caregivers who are caring for seniors are seniors themselves.***
- ***The value of family caregiver services is estimated to be $306 billion dollars annually, twice as much as is spent on homecare and nursing home services combined.***

Research states that caregivers benefit from support and information. The "Return to Home" program focuses on the needs of caregivers who are caring for a senior immediately after a hospital discharge. This program enables discharge planning staff at United Health Services and Lourdes hospitals to make referrals to caregiver specialists at the Office for Aging (OFA), who then conduct a comprehensive assessment of the caregiver's needs and follow up with the caregiver at regular intervals.

The needs of caregivers change over time and this program proactively supports caregivers in transition. The goal is to increase caregiver confidence and knowledge, reduce caregiver burden, and reduce hospital readmissions.

The RTH program has served more than 70 caregivers. Most caregivers, prior to the hospitalization of their loved one, were providing 30-49 hours of care, but after hospitalization, this increased to 50-60 hours.

Return to Home proved to be very successful.

- Caregivers reported a reduction in stress. At the initial assessment 73% reported stress and by the end of the program the percent of caregivers reporting stress was 43%.
- Eighty-five percent (85%) of the caregivers said their biggest need was for more information about services and resources. Referrals were provided for a variety of services including respite and financial support.
- Almost half of caregivers reached were in their first year of caregiving.
- More than 82% of caregivers said that their care recipient was at risk for being placed in a nursing home if services at home could not be provided.

At the end of the program, participants were asked to evaluate the program. Caregivers reported that the most helpful aspects of the program were information and referrals, support for their caregiving role, and knowing they can contact OFA should they need something in the future.

DeeDee Camp, AF Project Manager said, "The Return to Home program improves the link between acute care and the community. The relationships between OFA staff and the hospital staff make possible an improved transition for each caregiver."

Stay Connected – Stay Well Resources Available

The 2006 *Stay Connected – Stay Well* calendar was so helpful to seniors that we have received calls for the 2007 version. What seniors can receive instead is a new booklet highlighting local services and activities and offering tips for staying socially connected. The booklet, which would be particularly useful for someone just moving to the area, includes contact information for classes, exercise options, volunteer opportunities, and a chart of the B.C. Transit options.

In addition, the *Stay Connected – Stay Well* Explore Volunteering brochure is still available. It features suggestions on what jobs are available, including things to do from home, or how to translate a skill into a volunteer job. RSVP is the agency to contact for a match.

Improving Care to Seniors via Clinical Standards

United Health Services welcomed the opportunity to develop a Quality Initiative which focused on the clinical aspect of the *Strike Out Stroke* program. UHS launched a pilot at four primary care sites including Johnson City Family Care Center; Binghamton General Internal Medicine; Clinton Street; and Windsor. The program impacted a modest number of seniors, about 300, yet it is another story about a local organization that is changing how they do business to respond to the needs of seniors.

Chronically ill patients need to proactively manage their condition to avoid acute episodes of illness and complications. The QI Initiative was designed to encourage more proactive communication with senior patients. Often the primary care sites are more focused on acute illness.

Medical staff at the four sites received training on how to use new electronic and hard copy tools with patients. The NextGen electronic health record, used by UHS staff, was updated to include a hypertension template which now offers graphs of blood pressure, height and weight, and compliance information on diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol and medications. It prompts communication about hypertension at every office visit. The improved medical record also offers on-screen access to the last blood pressure of any diabetic patient, height and BMI for all patients, and referrals for patients with a Body Mass Index greater than 30.

The goal was to reduce the blood pressure of one-third of the seniors in the overall group of 300 participants to below 140 over 90. The results showed an average reduction in systolic (upper reading) blood pressure from 152 to 129, (a 11% decrease) and a reduction in diastolic (lower reading) BP from 76 to 71.

The next step for UHS is to identify a physician and nurse champion at each site to promote referrals for self-management support. This local effort has national implications. We are pleased to report that, in part due to this modest initiative, UHS has been asked to partner with NextGen and Siemens vendors to pilot other improvements in their chronic disease management templates. These efforts will improve care far beyond the boundaries of Broome County.

Partnership Partners with Good Shepherd-Fairview Foundation

The Good Shepherd-Fairview Foundation awarded Aging Futures $4,100 which will allow us to offer 30 additional seniors the Strike Out Stroke program. United Health Services – Stay Health Center will coordinate the eight-month self management program.

African American seniors are at greater risk for stroke due to hypertension. We intend to reach out to African American faith communities and neighborhoods to identify seniors who can benefit from support.

The Partnership thanks the Foundation and looks forward to a successful project.

Working Together to Identify and Address Senior Depression

"Depression is NOT a normal part of aging." Aging Futures is working with our partners to offer the community new resources about geriatric depression and to increase identification and services for seniors with depression.

A new brochure, Seniors and Depression: Treatment and Recovery, discusses depression and its warning signs. It also encourages seniors and their caregivers to call one of the agencies listed if they think they need a counselor or other support. The brochure includes agency addresses and phone numbers. Multiple copies of the brochure are available by calling the AF office at 778-2064.

In the coming months, watch as Action for Older Persons, Inc. introduces a new educational series entitled "Caring Conversations on Tough Topics." Resources will include two informational videos (one targeting adults directly and one targeting family caregivers), accompanying large print booklets and public service announcements.

Workgroup Supports Development of Consumer Education Booklet

Living with Chronic Conditions: Managing Your Own Care is the latest in a series of booklets funded under New York's Real Choice Systems Change Grant.

The booklet features information on: Understanding Chronic Conditions, Managing Your Team, Learning about Your Condition, Coping Positively with Stress, Exercising for Wellness, Managing Pain, Eating Well, Adapting and Coping, Exercising Your Mind, Attending Support Groups, and Using Community Resources. Members of the Chronic Disease & Wellness Workgroup assisted in the development of the resource.

The original eight Real Choices booklets were created by Action for Older Persons, Inc. to complement educational programs about aspects of the long-term care system so that the public has the knowledge necessary to know what choices are available and how to access them. Find the booklets online at www.actionforolderpersons.net and click on Real Choices.

To receive multiple copies of Living with Chronic Conditions call 778-6145.