

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Social, Economic and Educational Factors that Influence Health

There is a strong association between social and economic factors and adverse health outcomes. Low socioeconomic status, including poverty, lack of education, and other factors are strong influences on health. Wisconsin hospitals are dedicating resources and developing programs to address these issues and improve the health status of those individuals that often cannot access even basic health services.

Health education for seniors



Internal Medicine Specialist Dr. Lee Klemens, M.D. speaks to a full house at CMH about aging and frailty.

Senior citizens in the Oconto County community are being proactive about their health by attending free seminars at Community Memorial Hospital. The response to the new Senior Special series hosted by CMH has been outstanding—the seminars have been filled to capacity.

“Folks in our community are glad to have the opportunity to become educated and take charge of their health,” said Jim Van Dornick, Community Memorial Hospital CEO.

The CMH Senior Specials series features specialty physicians speaking about the health issues of senior citizens. The series began in May, 2010 with Dr. Colette Salm-Schmid, the area’s leading breast surgeon, who addressed questions about mammograms. In July Dr. Lee Klemens, CMH Internal Medicine Specialist, presented the topic “Aging & Frailty: An Opportunity for Prevention.” In August Dr. Jeffrey

Bentson, CMH orthopedic surgeon, spoke about knee and joint issues.

“People appreciate that these seminar topics are tailored to the needs of their age group,” said Van Dornick. “CMH looks forward to continuing Senior Specials as an ongoing series.”

The series continues in September with Dr. Judith Bowers, OB/Gyn with CMH Center for Women’s Care, speaking about Senior Women’s Health.

Community Memorial Hospital, Oconto Falls

Economic Security Initiative for older adults

The Economic Security Initiative (ESI) is led by Aurora Family Service in Milwaukee to assist older adults in reaching a measure of economic security. The program serves adults 55 years and older, federal poverty level of 250 percent or below, to navigate through community programs. The ESI assists clients primarily with financial services such as money management, representative payee, credit counseling, debt management, foreclosure counseling, and a property tax program. Two cases in point:

1. An 84 year-old Milwaukee senior who owned her home for 52 years is at risk of losing her home because she is unable to make payments. She had already used a reverse mortgage line of credit to pay for bills and property taxes. She does not have any other income to pay for her current monthly expenses, which are double what she earns per month.

Her son, who is an Economic Security Initiative client, introduced her to the program at Aurora Family Service. The ESI staff conducted a full assessment to determine her eligibility for Nutrition Stock Box, Homestead Credit, Energy Assistance, Social Supplemental Income (SSI), Medicaid, and Foodshare.

A proud and independent woman, she was at first cautious. She told the ESI staff that she would have to think it over with her family and take baby steps. She agreed to start accepting help by having ESI assist with enrolling her for Energy Assistance.

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As a trusting relationship was established over the course of several months, she allowed the ESI staff to assist with enrolling her for the other programs that were offered.

Now she receives services from Medicaid, Energy Assistance, Homestead Credit, Nutrition Box, Food share, and Medicare Extra Help. With assistance from these programs, she is able to save over \$800 each month. The savings enabled her to pay the first installment of her property taxes, and she will be able to pay the remaining balance after Homestead Credit sends her a check.

Now with so many resources in hand, she is free from financial stress, able to enjoy retirement and most importantly, save her home of 52 years from being foreclosed.

2. Imagine that you are dependent upon another person to provide financial support, but now that person is gone. What would you do?

That was the case for L.A., a 77 year-old senior woman, diagnosed with high blood pressure and diabetes.

After L.A.'s husband passed away, she held rummage sales to help with the out-of-pocket expenses for his funeral. She also found herself faced with a house payment, health insurance and food costs, along with a change in income. Her main concern was getting assistance with the prescription medications she needed because of her health conditions.

She learned that the prescription and pension plans were seized upon her husband's death and his pension would go to his first wife. L.A. was informed she would get an increase in her social security payment. Still, L.A. was concerned as to how she would afford her medications and qualify for health insurance due to her pre-existing conditions.

L.A. turned to the Economic Security Initiative (ESI) at Aurora Family Service for program assistance. She met with ESI staffer Karen for a full assessment. Karen recommended Food Stock Box, Senior Care, Medicare D, Medicaid Deductible plan, Medicare Extra Help, and Senior Law with regard to the property responsibility to secure the resources she would need. L.A. had already found a senior living facility to move to and joined a prescription discount program for the monthly medications. With Karen's support, L.A. is now a member of the Senior Care Rx program has the AARP Advantage Plan through Secure Horizon.

Karen reports that L.A. is more relaxed about her health and is trying to live a better life. She noted, "In January 2011, L.A. contacted me and said that everything was in place. She does not have to worry about getting sick and medical expenses. I am glad we are able to assist her with the different resources."

Aurora Health Care, Milwaukee

Voucher Program offered to those with immediate needs

Thanks to the generosity of the Howard Young Foundation, inpatients and emergency room patients that are discharged from Ministry's Howard Young Health Care in Woodruff or Eagle River are provided with the needed essentials to get them through the next day, through a voucher system.

The Spiritual Services and Case Management departments within the hospitals have the ability to provide vouchers to departing patients for their immediate needs. This includes:

- Prescription vouchers for patients requiring a medication
- Transportation / taxi vouchers for patients that don't have a ride home from the facility
- Food vouchers for the basic and immediate necessities
- Hotel vouchers for a night's stay, for the homeless or other, until arrangements can be made with the nearest homeless shelter, family or friends
- Gas vouchers to ensure the patient can get to and from the hospital for needed services

The voucher program is closely monitored through a computer system, and further enables staff to provide follow up and needed assistance. If a hotel voucher is given, staff can follow up with the person to be sure they have the needed arrangements with a homeless shelter, family or friends.

In 2009, 38 vouchers were given, totaling nearly \$5,000. Half of that sum was used in transportation vouchers, providing taxi rides or gas cards to those in need. The voucher program was started in 2005.

"We are so fortunate to have the Howard Young Foundation's assistance in helping to provide the immediate services, such as medications, shelter and food, that are essential in a patient's recovery, upon their discharge from the hospital," said Chaplain Brian Iverson, Ministry Howard Young Health Care. "Many patients don't have family or friends they can count on for a ride home, or safe housing for the night, or the needed prescriptions. The voucher program enables them to get the needed supplies that will temporarily get them through the day, until they can make other needed arrangements."

Ministry Howard Young Health Care, Woodruff

Submit community benefit stories to Mary Kay Grasmick, editor, at mgrasmick@wha.org.



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