

Care, Comfort and Hope

Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits

Mental Health and Mental Disorders: support groups

Mental disorders vary in severity and in their impact on people's lives. The symptoms can be severe and extremely destructive, causing immeasurable suffering for the patient and their families. Hospitals see an ever-increasing number of patients seeking treatment for mental disorders in their emergency departments. Inpatient mental health services are offered at 44 hospitals in Wisconsin and are generally operated at a loss, but because of the importance of treating these patients in the community, hospitals continue to place a high priority on providing mental health services to patients and their families. Sadly, nearly a third of those who are homeless suffer from serious mental illness.

Support for caregivers—powerful tools

For several years the Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers has partnered with the Aging & Disability Resource Center, Wisconsin Caregiver Alliance, and Rivers Bend, a local long-term care facility, to offer "Taking Care of You - Powerful Tools for Caregivers."

This six-week, interactive class is offered at no charge to members of the general public and is targeted to those family members and friends who are caring for older adults with stroke, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and other long-term conditions.

The class has been described as a wonderful resource and respite by participants who learn techniques to reduce personal stress, guilt and anger, and techniques to communicate effectively and with confidence with medical professionals and other family members.

Arlene Kunesh is a retired Aurora registered nurse retained by Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers to teach the class. Arlene brings years of experience and caregiver expertise to leading the interactive lessons, discussions and brainstorming that make the program so lively and extremely beneficial.

Powerful Tools for Caregivers is offered two times a year.

Aurora Medical Center in Two Rivers

Support group bonds visually impaired residents

At the first meeting of St. Francis Home's visually impaired person (VIP) support group, Activities Director Audrey Uhl asked the gathering how many suffered from macular degeneration. Everyone there raised his or her hand.

"It was amazing. I told them that although you may not be able to see it, you have all raised your hands," she recalls.

It was an enlightening moment for Uhl, who knows that visual impairment is a major issue for people as they age. But it was also the reason for forming the VIP support group for residents of St. Francis Home, St. Francis Terrace and St. Clare terrace.

"We noticed that a lot of residents were struggling with vision loss, and it was affecting their lives. Even when we asked them to join in our activities, they would say they couldn't because of their vision problems. They felt very isolated."

The VIP support group has been able to bring these individuals together so they can understand that others have the same problem too. Plus it allows residents to share stories, voice their concerns and learn more about vision concerns.

"Cognitively they are a very sharp group," says Uhl. "During our meetings we try to focus on their other senses, with activities such as listening to music, tasting food and hearing guest speakers, including a physician specializing in macular degeneration."

Residents are embracing the support group, whose membership includes more than 20 people.

Uhl admits it has been a learning experience for her too. "Just doing little things can make life easier for these individuals; things the average person would not think about ... such as always placing food in the same location on their plate during meals, so they know what is where when they eat."

She adds: "Our initial meetings have gone well and I am optimistic about what is possible for the future. We will continue to focus on the positive—what these individuals can still do and enjoy doing."

Agnesian HealthCare, Fond du Lac
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Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

Help through the grieving process

A Grief Support Group for people who are grieving the loss of a loved one was held Tuesday evenings for six consecutive weeks October 6 through November 10 at the United Methodist Church in Black River Falls. The support group, sponsored by Black River Memorial Hospital, was open to the public at no cost. Facilitated by hospital social worker Denise Gearing, the group provided the opportunity to meet with others who are experiencing the loss of a loved one and to provide the tools to help people go through the grieving process. Material and information on the grieving process was shared with the participants.

Black River Memorial Hospital, Black River Falls

Support groups help the healing process

There is something therapeutic that occurs when the ups and downs of one's medical condition are shared with others. Emotional progress, if not physical progress, is much more likely to occur when patients can share their experiences and support one another. Whether the healing is physical or emotional, Fort HealthCare understands the importance that human connections have in the healing process.

Both hospital-based and registered community support groups are able to gather for free at Fort Memorial Hospital in Fort Atkinson. The support group leaders and participants attend at no charge, and complimentary refreshments are provided by the hospital.

Additionally, Fort Memorial Hospital's Health Promotion department prints and mails out monthly member newsletters on behalf of certain support groups that request the service. Fort HealthCare covers the cost of the printing and postage.

Support groups are a valuable addition to professional treatment for a wide variety of conditions. Fort HealthCare serves groups of individuals that are experiencing physical limitations or recovery from major surgeries, individuals and families that have been victims of abuse, educational presentations, and just a gathering place for other community groups inspired to develop caring programs for our friends and neighbors. Support groups using Fort HealthCare services and facilities include Bariatric/LAP-BAND Support Group, Diabetic Support Group, Friends Through Multiple Sclerosis, Ostomy Support Group, Postpartum Depression Support Group and others.

Creating an environment for members of the community to gather together and support one another is one of the ways that Fort HealthCare lives the organization's Mission on a daily basis, which is to provide excellent, compassionate care for the people of our communities.

Fort HealthCare, Fort Atkinson

Helping those dealing with grief

Loss touches everyone in a different way, and the holiday season can be an especially difficult time. So every year, leading up to the holiday season, Gundersen Lutheran Health System offers "Turkey, Tinsel and Tears: How to Live Without a Loved One," a program to help people deal with loss. The program is offered in five rural communities where people are often isolated and/or do not have easy access to professional help in dealing with grief.

The program includes informational displays, local speakers who discuss their experiences in dealing with their personal loss, a panel discussion and audience questions. Further help is available to participants through Gundersen Lutheran Bereavement Services and the local health care facilities.

Gundersen Lutheran Health System, La Crosse

Mile Bluff helps provide Victory Over Depression

Coping with and helping out a loved one who struggles with depression is not an easy task. Whether it's a spouse, child, parent, grandparent or friend; depression hurts more than that individual.

At the request of a mother whose teenage daughter suffers with depression — and to meet the growing needs of the community — Mile Bluff Medical Center in Mauston formed the Victory Over Depression support group.

The group covered topics such as: the definition of depression, how loved ones can help, the purpose of depression, treatment options, types of depression, and how diet aids in recovery and prevention of depression.

The benefit of having local resources — such as this program at Mile Bluff — has proved to be very beneficial in helping families cope with daily stresses due to the depression their loved ones face. The group has given a number of community members the tools necessary to gain Victory Over Depression!

Mile Bluff Medical Center, Mauston

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Wisconsin Hospitals Community Benefits (continued)

Supporting families who've lost babies

Losing a child through miscarriage, stillbirth or infant death is very emotional and can be hard to deal with for families. Upland Hills Health's Obstetrics and Social Services Departments see the need for these families to be able to acknowledge and remember their losses.

A group of bereavement counselors specially trained in pregnancy loss organized "A Time to Remember," an event to honor those babies who have died through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or infant death.

The event highlights Pregnancy Loss Awareness Month, designed to bring awareness about what causes pregnancy losses and the emotional struggle they can be for families.

The event, held in October, is free to all and gives families the chance to remember their lost babies, network and socialize, and speak with bereavement counselors if they choose to.

Upland Hills Health, Dodgeville

Laughter truly is the best medicine

We've all heard the old adage that "laughter is the best medicine," but few people realize how true it is.

"Laughter is a natural high," said Cyndy Solliday-McRoy, PhD, a psychologist with Wheaton Franciscan Medical Group and Certified Laughter Yoga Leader who has leads a free class, "Laughing our Way to Optimal Health," at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare – Wauwatosa.

"When we laugh, our bodies release hormones & chemicals that have startling positive effects on our entire system, including our mental health," said Solliday-McRoy, who speaks nationally on the subject. "It focuses your awareness on happy feelings in the here and now while distracting you from any negative thoughts, emotions or situations in your life."

The class, which has about 70 loyal participants, combines yoga breathing and laughter. The hour-long session is divided into three stages, starting with a "grounding" exercise, similar to more traditional yoga offerings. Here, participants are asked to clear their minds and focus on the exercise. Next, participants are asked to find a partner, make eye-contact with them and act out a "pose" or scenario that simulates laughter. Students then rotate partners for 20 minutes conducting the same exercise. Finally, the class closes with an instructor-guided meditation.

Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare, Milwaukee

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



Read more about hospitals connecting with their communities at www.WiServePoint.org.