

## Richmond seniors live well with new illness self-management program

By Sylvina Poole

It's a fact of life for the elderly: chronic illnesses increase with age, said city health district officials.

It helps to generally live a healthy lifestyle, but it's especially important to be knowledgeable about managing specific chronic diseases that you may have to maintain an enjoyable quality of life.

"Let's say a friend or family member lives alone, they have diabetes, impairment of their vision, high blood pressure, be overweight, and also suffer from mild arthritis. When friends talk to them they sense that they're overwhelmed and might be depressed. Her friends are constantly trying to provide encouragement and reassurance, but they do not see signs of improvement. They continue to be concerned but are unsure of whom they should ask for help," said Michael Welch, at the Richmond City Health District coordinator of the illness self-management program.

He said that while the above scenario is fictitious, but unfortunately much too realistic in the metropolitan Richmond area.

The size of the U.S. population over 65 years of age will double over the next 25 years. Currently the average 75 year old suffers from three chronic conditions and takes five different medications. Medicare

beneficiaries with five or more chronic diseases see an average of 14 different physicians a year. And 96 percent of Medicare expenditures are the result of paying for those seniors with two or more chronic diseases. No wonder she is overwhelmed and depressed, Welch explained.

However, Senior Connections in partnership with the Richmond City Health District and the Chesterfield Health District is now offering a workshop entitled, Chronic Disease Self-Management Program.

This free program endorsed by the U.S. Surgeon General, meets once per week for six weeks for approximately two hours. The goal is to enable participants to build self-confidence and to assume a major role in maintaining their health and managing their chronic health conditions. Numerous studies have shown that this workshop will decrease symptoms, improve behaviors, improve self-efficacy, and sometimes decrease health care utilization.

The program led by lay professionals, many with chronic diseases themselves, gives people the confidence, motivation and coping strategies they need to manage the challenges of living with a chronic health condition through feedback, action planning, behavior modeling, problem-solving techniques and decision making.



which are applicable to all chronic diseases.

Program participants should be adults experiencing chronic health conditions such as: high blood pressure; arthritis; heart disease; stroke; lung disease and diabetes. However, any long term health condition that impacts one's daily activities are encouraged to attend. Participants can also be family members, friends and caregivers of those with a chronic health condition. During the six-week program, participants

are taught to control their symptoms through: relaxation techniques; changing their diets, managing sleep and fatigue; using medications correctly; exercising and communicating with health providers.

Senior Connections is now seeking individuals and particularly organizations interested in hosting this six week program with a class size of at least 10-16 people.

Contact Joan Welch with Senior Connections at 804-615-0135 to enroll your organization.

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