Aging in Marin: A Public Health Perspective

By Dr. Matt Willis, Marin County Public Health Officer

In 2007, the Marin County Grand Jury used the phrase “Silver Tsunami” in referring to Marin’s growing aging population. While it is true that the aging of the population will have a dramatic impact on Marin over the coming decades, communities are welcoming the challenge and taking action to improve the quality of life for all citizens as well as for older adults. Creating an environment where all can “live long and live well” is an emerging public health priority. Seniors are the fastest growing age group in Marin. In 2030, an estimated one in three Marin residents will be over age 60, compared to one in four today. This is partly a reflection of our unusual longevity as a county.

Last year, a nationally publicized report concluded that Marin women had the longest life expectancy in the U.S. at 85 years, five years longer than the national average for women. Marin men ranked fifth for male life expectancy, at 81.4 years.

While there is plenty to celebrate, not all Marin communities enjoy long life expectancy. Within Marin, we find a 17 year difference in life expectancy between our healthiest and our least healthy neighborhoods at the level of census tract. The leading cause of death in communities where people live shorter lives is preventable cardiovascular events—primarily heart attack and stroke. In those longest-living communities, the leading cause of death shifts toward less preventable cancers.

This places an even greater premium on primary prevention, including opportunities to promote healthy eating through a person’s entire lifespan, as well as age-appropriate fitness programs and recreational facilities that offer convenient, free, and safe options for physical activity. The fact that one in four Marin County adults is obese, and one in ten is a smoker, suggests there is plenty to be done now to ensure more can “live long and live well.”

My understanding of the needs of Marin’s older adults is informed by my experiences as an internist in this community. Many of my primary care patients were older adults. I recognized that despite the therapies we might offer, good nutrition, being physically active and remaining engaged in a mutually supportive community were the most important determinants of health. As Public Health Officer, I work to help create an environment in which everyone can lead healthy lives and thrive across the age spectrum. We are working together to build all of Marin into an aging-friendly community and I am looking forward to my part within it.
Message from the Commission Chair

By Jim Monson

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about my older friend Joe. Joe was a mentor and role model for me and many others. As Joe aged, many of his friends would ask him solicitously about his health. He would often answer, “Oh, I’m taking nourishment.” By his self-deprecating sense of humor, Joe was referring to the old chart notes at the foot of the bed of a hospital patient who was able to eat, barely. In reality, Joe was taking nourishment from a rich and varied diet of life: swimming daily, loving family, challenging himself intellectually, and interacting with his many colleagues and associates. He was also giving plenty of nourishment with his mentoring, community service, and working with young people up until his death in his 90s.

As I grow older, I find this notion of continuing to take and give nourishment very helpful as I leave behind activities that I’m no longer able to pursue. My work on the Marin County Commission on Aging is an example. I encourage you to join me and the other Commissioners in our efforts to advocate and educate on behalf of Marin County seniors. There will be several openings on the Commission for terms that expire at the end of June, 2014 – City of Tiburon and Supervisorial District Number 4, among others. There are also continuing opportunities to participate in the standing committees of the Commission: Health and Nutrition, Housing and Transportation, Legislative, and Planning. Information, applications to join the Commission and schedules are on the Commission website: www.marinhhs.org/boards/commission-aging All meetings are open to the public, and you needn’t be a Commission member if you wish to join a committee. I look forward to your participation.

Prescription for Health

By Fred Mayer and Mary Ellen Taylor

“Caveat emptor,” a Latin phrase for “let the buyer beware,” can be used as a piece of advice for older adults who have medication regimens. Older adults often take multiple medications and/or herbal remedies for different conditions. It is important to read the label, avoid problems, ask questions, and keep a record of all medications that every family member takes.

Read the label
The label should list the ingredients. If you know you’re allergic to anything don’t use it. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for a different medicine. Read the warnings and expiration date carefully. Do not use expired medicine.

Avoid problems
Ask your doctor or pharmacist about potential side effects associated with your medication, including sleepiness, vomiting, bleeding, headaches, rashes, etc. Organize your medicines and don’t skip taking any dosages. Don’t share medicines and don’t take any in the dark.

Ask questions
What is the medicine’s name? Is there a generic available? Why am I taking this medicine? When should I take it?

Keep a record
Keep a record of your medications with dosages, your reasons for taking them, and how often you take them. Put it in your purse or wallet and show it to your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse at each visit.

Be careful
Check with your healthcare providers, especially your pharmacist, before filling any new prescriptions. Show your pharmacist what other medications, including herbals and dietary supplements, you are taking before filling any new prescriptions.

Fred Mayer lives in Terra Linda and previously owned Sausalito Pharmacy. For additional information, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to PPSI/FDA Brochure, POB 6760, San Rafael, Calif. 94903-0760. Visit ppsinc.org or email ppsi@aol.com.
Updated Website

By Amy Dietz

Older adults are increasingly using the internet to find information and connect with loved ones. Pew Research Center found that for the first time, at least half of people 65 and older are online. Internet usage has become part of the daily routine of online seniors.

With the help of the Marin County Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Media Team, the Area Agency on Aging has updated and improved its webpages. Information about programs and contractors, frequently asked questions, and access to publications like this Great Age newsletter are now easily accessible. You can visit us here: www.marinhhs.org/aging-adult-services

Amy Dietz is a Project Coordinator with Marin Aging and Adult Services

Affordable Senior Housing: A Shared Alternative

By Leslie Klor

What does a TV program like “The Golden Girls” have to do with affordable housing? Three things are currently happening in Marin: the senior population is growing by leaps and bounds, seniors want to “age in place” or stay in their homes as long as possible, and there is a shortage of affordable housing. “Affordable” is a relative term. What is affordable for one may not be for another. In Marin, the waiting lists for senior subsidized housing may involve a 2-4 year wait. As for aging in your own home, 30% of those over 65 live alone in their homes with empty bedrooms and space to spare. While they may own property, some of them may not be able to afford basic necessities or additional help.

Enter Episcopal Senior Communities with their Shared Housing Program. Shared housing is not a new idea. Hip Housing in Palo Alto has been offering this service for over 30 years. It has been tried in Marin and Sonoma counties in the past, but the programs were closed due to lack of funding. Now, Episcopal Senior Services has stepped up to offer that option. We encourage seniors who have their own homes to rent out their extra bedrooms for money (between $700-900) or as a trade for services, including: cooking, shopping, helping with errands, a sense of security, and companionship.

This has proven challenging. People seem reluctant to have anyone in their homes and having their privacy invaded. Most people want their own space, but may not be able to afford it. Remember “The Golden Girls?” There were four women, ahead of their time, sharing a home together and having fun. Not only were they saving money, they were reaping the benefits of companionship and friendship, which lends itself to a longer, healthier life! For further information, contact Leslie Klor at 415 456 9062 ext.132.

Leslie Klor is the Director of Shared Housing at Episcopal Senior Communities
Ron Thiesen: Workercise

By Sylvia Landman

“Yard work, house work, walking, and volunteering help me remain physically fit,” says 67 year old Ron Thiesen, a retired Manager of Environmental and Engineering Services living in Novato.

“I could not adhere to an exercise regimen when I retired so I developed what I call a ‘workercise’ program to avoid becoming sedentary and allow time to stay active outdoors,” he says. “Every day I decide what to do around the house. I begin with tasks that require sitting and take hourly breaks to get up to perform other chores that require physical exertion. Next, I take on tasks that require greater physical exertion working for about a half hour at a time. When doing yard work, I reverse the process and take sitting breaks to avoid over exertion and to assure that I work safely. Volunteering to help others fits well with my workercise philosophy,” he adds.

“I routinely do trail and habitat restoration work on the Marin Municipal Water District watersheds but I also enjoy helping family, friends and neighbors with tasks/projects that they need to complete. Making time to expend effort for the common good also gives me positive feelings and energy which in turn helps to energize my day-to-day ‘workercise efforts.’”

Sylvia Landman is a retired teacher and author living in Novato.

Don’t Miss the 10th Annual Healthy Aging Symposium

Thursday, May 8, 2014
9:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m.
Embassy Suites Hotel
San Rafael

Featured speaker: David Lindeman, PhD, Director of the Center for Technology and Aging and other speakers to be announced.

Pre-registration required, before April 30, $20 fee includes lunch. Download registration form at https://www.marinhhs.org/boards/commission-aging, or call (415) 473-2980. No registration at the door.
To Move or Not to Move?
By Carol Zeller

Most seniors know that as we age, physical activity and exercise become essential to well being. Exercise offers many benefits to the senior citizen by maintaining physical health, mental health and improving cognition. Physically, the benefits relate to increasing the ability to live independently, reduce the risk of falling and fracturing bones, and may reduce the impact of chronic disease. Also, muscle strength and endurance will be enhanced. Mentally, exercise can boost self esteem, improve sleep, and helps to keep the brain active. The endorphins produced by exercise actually reduce feelings of sadness and depression. Other studies are verifying that executive functions (planning, organizing) improve and loss of memory is prevented. There are many barriers to participating in physical activity and exercise. However, it is important to focus on the benefits of moving and the many activities that can be used to achieve physical activity and/or exercise each day.

There are activities which will help people to overcome their fears about exercise. Here are some tips to include in planning for physical activity or exercise. Talk to your doctor first for medical clearance, especially if you have a pre-existing condition.

- Start slowly and build up your activity in small increments.
- Breathe regularly, especially with strength building exercises. Breathe out when lifting an object and breathe in when relaxing.
- Use safety equipment when indicated.
- Drink adequate amounts of fluid unless your doctor tells you not to.
- Bend forward from the hips, not the waist. Keep your back straight.
- Warm up your muscles by walking or arm pumping.
- Use a variety of reminders - record your exercise session on a calendar.
- Invest in a good pair of workout shoes.
- Find a buddy or class.

When considering developing a physical activity/exercise program, it is essential to consider different types as it helps to reduce monotony as well as improve general overall health.

Here are the building blocks of a senior fitness program.

- **Endurance**: This workout should get your heart pumping and you may feel short of breath. These activities promote independence through enhancing the ability to do daily activities, such as grocery shopping, house cleaning, or laundry.

- **Strength**: Weights, resistance bands, or machines are used to build up muscle through repetitive motions. These exercises prevent loss of bone and build balance which decrease the of falls and help to maintain an active lifestyle.

- **Flexibility**: A workout program which emphasizes stretching exercises, such as Yoga or Pilates. This building block develops the ability of your body’s joints to move freely through full range of motion.

- **Balance**: Working to strengthen your leg muscles below the knee through Yoga, Tai Chi, and posture exercises helps to gain balance and an increase sense of self-confidence.

There are many avenues to explore to increase physical activity and exercise. Community centers, YMCA, churches and other organizations offer many opportunities to participate in various exercise class. There are resources on the internet and videos demonstrating safe exercises for senior citizens. So get up off of the couch and move for a future of health and happiness in your senior years!

Carol Zeller is a Commissioner representing the City of Corte Madera
AB 241 Prescribes New Regulations for Caregivers
By Francine Bedinger

Imagine that your spouse needs sudden care from a recent fall and that your children are unable to assist you. Your task after your spouse’s discharge from the hospital is to provide personal home care for your loved one. It requires stand-by assistance, updating medications, meal preparation, the daily chores of running a household, and possible physical assistance with movement. For a short period of time this may be manageable, but if there is no change in sight, you may need to create a plan of care. The options are varied and depend upon each individual’s personal preferences, but almost all plans will involve the assistance of a caregiver. Caregivers range from family members to private or agency hires. Wherever they are from, and whatever their experience, there is a growing need for their services.

The importance and value of the caregiver workforce is very significant. Caregiving is a relationship that requires assistance from all parties. In fact, the term caregiver in many venues has been slowly changing into “care partner,” representing this symbiotic relationship. The partners will need to team together to meet their goals of healthy living through trust, commitment, and care for one another.

Up until recently, there have been few rules for hiring caregivers in California. But as of January 1st, 2014 there is a new regulation titled, AB241 Minimum Wage and Overtime Rules for Caregivers. AB241 covers all domestic employees, including housekeepers, nannies, and caregivers. All who hire caregivers, including families, residential facilities or home care agencies, will be responsible for meeting this new law’s requirements. These include: minimum wage and overtime, adequate rest and relief, employee safety protections, and detailed time tracking. For part time assistance, the law has little impact, but for those who wish to employ the help of a caregiver for longer shifts and overnight live-in care, it may present challenges.

Caregivers’ rights to a living wage and fair conditions are extremely important to the wellbeing of both the family member and the caregiver. Creative approaches to finding agreeable rates of pay, and the possible need to hire additional caregivers so as to avoid overtime, will be needed to meet the needs of our growing senior population.

For more information, go to www.domesticemployers.org or you can call the Women’s Employment Rights Clinic at 415-442-6647.

Francine Bedinger is a Commissioner representing District 2
Episcopal Senior Communities provides continued care and assisted housing for older adults, plus outreach programs and services in seven Bay Area counties. Hispanic seniors benefit from one such program, Alma Latina, (Latin Soul) housed at Margaret Todd Senior Center in Novato.

Silvia Carsillo, Multiculturalist and Director of Alma Latina, provides information and referrals, coordinates two ESL classes weekly, and oversees a Citizenship class. “Language barriers become a challenge when trying to adjust to a new culture,” she explains, “Non English speaking seniors, are doubly challenged when secluded in their homes due to lack of transportation and the ability to communicate comfortably, thus becoming a subculture within their own culture.”

Silvia wants to bridge existing cultural gaps. For example, “Exploring Marin” is an ongoing plan to expose seniors to public transportation. Marin Transit offers bilingual trainings working with Silvia to empower the Hispanic senior community.

Working with seniors for 20 years, Silvia has experience reaching out to them from many countries. “Seniors are my favorite group of people,” she explains. “They share experiences freely so gracefully and humbly—they inspire me!”

Episcopal Senior Communities ofrece atención continua y vivienda asistida para adultos mayores, así como los programas y servicios de extensión en siete condados. Latinos de tercera edad se benefician de uno de esos programas, Alma Latina, ubicado en Margaret Todd Senior Center en Novato.

Silvia Carsillo , Multiculturalista y Directora de Alma Latina, propone información y referencias, coordina clases de inglés como segundo idioma y supervisa una clase de Ciudadanía. “Las barreras del idioma se convierten en un reto cuando se trata de adaptarse a una nueva cultura”, explica Silvia “las personas mayores que no hablan Inglés, tienen el reto por partida doble, ya que a menudo son recluidas en sus hogares debido a la falta de transporte y poder comunicarse con comodidad, convirtiéndose así en una subcultura dentro de su propia cultura.”

Silvia quiere salvar la distancia entre las diferencias culturales existentes. Por ejemplo, "Explorando Marín" es un plan en curso para exponer las personas mayores al transporte público. Marin Transit ofrece capacitaciones bilingües y Silvia trabaja con ellos para empoderar la comunidad latina de mayor edad.”

Silvia tiene experiencia con la gente de tercera edad de muchos países. "Los adultos mayores son mi grupo favorito de gente", explica Silvia. “Comparten experiencias libremente con tanta gracia y humildad ---¡me inspiran!”
Find the service that’s right for you!

The public is invited to participate in all meetings held by the Commission and its Committees. General Commission meetings are held on the second Thursday of the month. Presentations at the Commission meetings typically start at 10:00 a.m., followed by the business meeting at 11:15 a.m. Meeting dates and presentations are as follows:

- **May 8**
  - Speaker: TBD
  - Topic: TBD
  - Place: Embassy Suites, 101 McInnis Parkway, San Rafael
- **June 12**
  - Speaker: TBD
  - Topic: Ombudsman and Adult Protective Services
  - Place: Alma Via, 515 Northgate Dr., San Rafael
- **July 10**
  - Topic: TBD
  - Speaker: TBD
  - Place: Marguerita Johnson Senior Center, 640 Drake Ave., Marin City
- **August**
  - No Meeting

Meeting dates are held at the Division of Aging and Adult Services Facilities at 10 North San Pedro Road, San Rafael. For details call 473-7118.

To request an alternative format of this publication, call 473-4381 (voice)/473-3232 (TTY) or e-mail disabilityaccess@marincounty.org.

**Featured in This Issue:**
- Aging in Marin: A Public Health Perspective
- Spring 2014 Calendar of Meetings

The mission of the Commission is to provide information and advocacy for services that enable older adults to live with dignity, grace age-friendly programs, legislatively. The mission of the Commission on Aging is a federal mandate advisory council.

Call the Information and Assistance Line at 473-7718.

Find the service that’s right for you!