

Assessing the Community's Health Needs

Dedication to community service is a longstanding tradition at Cedars-Sinai and an intrinsic part of the Medical Center's mission and organizational culture.

In order to better respond to community needs, Cedars-Sinai conducts a study every three years that provides detailed information on a variety of health issues. The 2007 Community Needs Assessment shows that access to health care is a significant issue for vulnerable, under-served communities surrounding the Medical Center, where many residents have no health insurance. The study also found that:

- Diabetes is a major health problem for adults and seniors.
- Too many children and adolescents are overweight or obese and do not participate in vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.
- Many adults and seniors are also overweight, increasing their risk of serious health problems.
- Access to flu shots needs to be improved to ensure that more seniors are immunized each year.

Cedars-Sinai already offers more than 60 programs each year that involve more than 5,300 events, including free screenings for a variety of medical conditions, health lectures, exercise programs, and flu shot clinics. More than half the programs are provided in collaboration with community partners such as schools, synagogues and churches, local government and law enforcement agencies, senior centers, and health and human service programs.

To address the findings of the 2007 Community Needs Assessment, Cedars-Sinai has adopted a strategic focus for 2008 that emphasizes reducing the risks and impacts of obesity and physical inactivity and associated medical problems. With this focus in mind, the Department of Community Health and Education will expand community health initiatives that promote prevention and health education for all age groups.

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scared of what he was facing and grateful to be alive.

"He seemed to feel at ease with me, and I left with this amazing feeling of gratification that I had helped someone in need," Cruz said. "He taught me that you have to learn to appreciate your life no matter what age you are."

Qi Yu, a research associate in the Department of Gastroenterology who has been a dinner-time volunteer for nearly a year, is gaining experience with patients that she feels will be valuable in medical school and in her planned future career as a doctor.

Yu's grandmother is in a nursing home, so she is particularly sensitive to the difficulties of older patients. "Often they're tired or they're on medication that affects their appetite. If you don't sit and talk with them,

they don't eat," she said. "Many of them don't have visitors, so they're happy to see the volunteers come in at mealtimes."

Program Serves as National Model

Pewitt notes that Mealtimes Mates has been attracting attention from hospitals across the nation. "I've had inquiries from hospitals in New York, Alabama, Florida and Pennsylvania," she said. "They heard about what we're doing, and they are using our program as a model."

Pewitt provides orientation and training for the volunteers so they are prepared to handle the needs of patients with various medical conditions. "I teach skills and strategies to help them with special challenges such as working with older

patients who are confused and can't verbalize their needs," she said.

She screens all patients referred to the program to determine their individual needs. She coordinates with each food service galley to ensure meals are delivered on time so the process goes smoothly for volunteers and patients. She also prepares language cards for volunteers so they can say basic greetings and phrases in the native tongue of patients who speak Russian, Farsi, Spanish or other languages.

For more information about Mealtimes Mates, please contact the Volunteer Office at (310) 423-8400.

Embracing Our Community



A newsletter produced by the Department of Community Health and Education at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center

Mealtimes Mates: Patients' Appetites Improve with Volunteer Help

Imagine what mealtimes is like for hospital patients who are unable to feed themselves. Some patients have difficulties with coordination, swallowing or weakness. Other patients have no appetite because they are exhausted, uncomfortable, lonely, frustrated or anxious about their health.

The volunteers who participate in Cedars-Sinai's Mealtimes Mates Program understand the physical and emotional issues that can prevent patients from eating well during a hospital stay. Volunteers are trained to help patients eat a better diet. They visit patients during breakfast, lunch or dinner and stay for an hour, setting up meal trays and offering whatever feeding assistance is needed — along with generous doses of encouragement.

Leslie Pewitt, coordinator of Mealtimes Mates, says patients who receive this kind of support usually eat more, while the interaction with volunteers

helps them feel less lonely. Another benefit of this program is that it can prevent patients from having to be given intravenous or tube feedings.

"It makes a big difference when our volunteers spend time talking to patients," Pewitt said. "It motivates them to eat. They really appreciate the assistance our volunteers provide and the companionship also means a lot to them. At the same time, this program frees the nursing staff to do other duties, and provides support to family members, giving them a chance to take a break if they need to."

Dedicated Group of Young Volunteers

The Mealtimes Mates Program was created nine years ago and has 23 volunteers, most of whom are Cedars-Sinai employees.

"This is an amazing group of young volunteers," Pewitt said. "Most of Cedars-Sinai's volunteers are retired seniors from the community. Young people don't usually have the time to participate. All of our Mealtimes Mates



Joe Cruz, Mealtimes Mates Volunteer

volunteers work full-time and some also go to school and must balance time away from their families, yet they are dedicated to giving an hour a week to patients."

Joe Cruz, a 33-year-old management assistant in Human Resources at Cedars-Sinai, has been volunteering one lunch hour each week to help feed patients for the past three years. He was particularly moved by a young man who had been paralyzed by a stroke. The patient, who was close to Cruz's age, said he was both

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Leadership Message



To be effective in our goal of improving the health status of the communities we serve, it is essential that we regularly assess the changing health needs of those communities. Evaluating community health needs – and developing programs to meet those needs – is a never-ending process at

Cedars-Sinai. We are dedicated to promoting better health through a wide variety of community benefit programs and we want to be sure that they are making a difference.

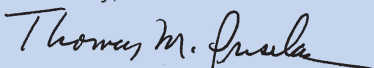
One of the best tools we have as we continually monitor, evaluate and improve these programs is the Community Needs Assessment. The assessment is conducted every three years to identify the most significant health challenges and needs in the areas surrounding the Medical Center. This study essentially takes the pulse of the community and then guides us in planning programs that help to improve the quality of life for people whose resources and access to health care are limited.

The latest needs assessment study points to a number of health issues that will be among our priorities in the coming year. One example of how we are using these findings to shape our community service agenda is a new initiative or Strategic Focus aimed at the problem of obesity and physical inactivity. The 2007 needs assessment affirmed what many other studies have shown — that poor diet combined with lack of physical activity is one of the leading causes of preventable death. In some communities near Cedars-Sinai, 1 in 4 adolescents and 1 in 5 adults are overweight or obese, which makes them more vulnerable to serious health issues.

We will work closely with many community partners to develop programs and services that will address this problem. We will also provide resources that will enable our partners to promote prevention and provide ongoing education for all age groups. This type of collaboration helps us achieve far-reaching impacts for our community programs.

You can learn more about this initiative in upcoming issues of *Embracing Our Community*. We look forward to combining Cedars-Sinai's strengths with our partners' unique capabilities to achieve significant improvement in the health and well-being of our community.

Sincerely,


Thomas M. Priselac
President and Chief Executive Officer

Providing Information and Emotional Support to Patients with Parkinson's

"What can I expect? How will I be doing a year from now? Or five years from now?"

The hardest part of Linda O'Connor's job is not being able to answer questions like these from patients who have been diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

As coordinator of the American Parkinson Disease Association Information and Referral Center at Cedars-Sinai, she is able to provide many practical and reassuring answers that make life easier for patients and their families. But no one can predict the course of this progressive neurological disorder. "Everyone wants to know what to expect, but there is no way to know because this disease affects everyone differently," O'Connor said.

Parkinson's, which affects more than 1.5 million Americans, involves areas of the brain that control movement. It can cause tremors, slowness of movement, difficulty walking, and stiffness in the arms, legs or neck. Symptoms can also include difficulties with writing, balance, speaking and swallowing, and patients may experience depression and confusion.

Helping Patients Find Resources

There is no cure for Parkinson's, but Cedars-Sinai has an experienced team of physicians who are Parkinson's experts. The Medical Center also offers a wide range of support services to patients and families through its partnership with the American Parkinson Disease Association, which resulted in the establishment of the Information and Referral Center 10 years ago.

The center offers the latest information on medical and surgical treatment for Parkinson's; referrals to neurologists who specialize in treating the disease; and help finding assistance in the home, medical equipment, exercise programs, counseling and a variety of other community services and resources.

The center also holds an annual educational conference at Cedars-Sinai and sponsors five support groups for patients and their families—including one for those who were diagnosed with the disease before age 50, although the highest incidence is among those over 60. All center services are free.

**American Parkinson
Disease Association
Information and Referral Center**
(877) 223-3277
(toll free)

O'Connor personally leads support groups and handles all phone inquiries. First, she listens: "I get a sense of the patient's situation, the challenges the family is facing and what's not working for them. Then I help

them problem-solve and point them in the right direction. It's very rewarding for me to see how relieved people are when they get some good information. In just one phone conversation, they become less anxious."

'Attitude is Everything'

Arthur Rosett, a 73-year-old Los Angeles resident who was diagnosed with Parkinson's about six years ago, regularly attends O'Connor's support group at the local YMCA. He also participates in an exercise program three times a week that helps relieve his symptoms. Rosett notes that support group discussions cover everything from practical needs such as home care and transportation resources to emotional issues such as depression and caregiver burnout.

"Everyone who has Parkinson's has certain symptoms that are difficult, and it's very good to have people you meet with regularly who are going through the same experience and have a good, practical approach on how to confront these issues," he said. "Learning about the experiences of others helps each one of us as we encounter the next challenge."

O'Connor says those who join her support groups tend to be patients who have done a lot of research about the disease and are determined to remain active. "I've found that attitude is everything," she said. "Those who have a positive yet realistic attitude and look to do whatever they can to help themselves tend to do much better."

Lifelong Fitness: Seniors Discover Benefits of Regular Exercise

"If anything hurts, cease and desist," Terese Miller says as she leads a group of seniors through a one-hour aerobics class at the Park La Brea Recreation Center in Los Angeles. "Now let's take a deep breath — inhale, exhale, roll your shoulders. How are you doing — you feeling okay?"

Miller offers a steady stream of encouraging words, health tips and exercise instructions during an "age-adjusted" workout that involves moderate, but almost non-stop movement to increase strength and flexibility, and improve balance. The six women and two men who are participating in Cedars-Sinai's Senior Shape Up Exercise Program on this recent morning seem to have no trouble keeping up, even though most of them are in their 80s.

During one exercise that involves standing and lifting one leg to the side and then the other, Miller said, "Are you still getting the benefit of this exercise if you hold onto your chair? You better believe it."

She offers alternative ways of doing some exercises for those who might have a problem such as arthritis in the shoulders or knees. She advises the seniors to skip any movement that causes discomfort. "Do what works for you," she tells the group.

While Miller leads the class through exercises that work every part of the body, she plays background music — upbeat arrangements, such as "You Can't Take That Away from Me." There is a relaxed feeling of camaraderie among the participants, but they watch Miller closely and work at doing each exercise according to her instructions.

Cedars-Sinai has been offering this

community program at Park La Brea for 21 years, and some of the current participants have been involved for as many as 15 to 20 years.

For example, there's Rae Briskman Stern, 84, who has been coming to the class for two decades. "This program has kept me limber all this time," she said. "When people find out my age, they often tell me I look younger. The exercise has kept me going. It's worth a fortune."

Ruth Davis, 89, said she first joined the program in 1994 because she wanted to meet people, but from a health perspective, "it's been a life saver. I'm much more flexible for my age than most people — my doctor even says so."

Exercise has been a lifelong habit for 85-year-old LeRoy Beavers, who said this program ensures that he gets a "total body workout" on a regular basis. He also values the social contact it has provided over the past 15 years. "It's like an extended family," he said, noting that when someone in the class gets sick, Miller and class participants send cards and call.

At 94, Gerda Frankel is the oldest person in the class. "Until I was 80, I never exercised," she said. She finally decided it was "now or never," and the Senior Shape Up Program has helped her stay "relatively limber" over the past 14 years. "What I'm getting out of it is enormous."

Many of those who participate in the class are what Miller calls "young old"—they are more active than many people their age

because of their commitment to exercise. "This is an amazingly positive group," she said. "They know they need to exercise. I keep it simple and try to make it fun."

Miller has seen the exercise program lift spirits and boost energy for people who are having a bad day because their arthritis is acting up or they didn't sleep well the night before. "They leave feeling better, and then they come back for more," she said. "Exercise helps them do their daily activities and really enjoy life."

The Senior Shape Up sessions are held Mondays and Wednesdays from 9 to 10 a.m. and are open to anyone age 50 or older. The fee is \$45 for 10 sessions.

**For more information
on Senior Shape Up,
please call
(310) 423-9581.**



From Left to Right is Rae Briskman Stern, Ruth Davis and LeRoy Beavers