



Healthier Living: A Chronic Disease Self-Management Program Overview

The Problem:

Chronic diseases - such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, cancer, and diabetes - are among the most prevalent, costly, and preventable of all health problems. Seven of every 10 Americans die of a chronic disease every year. The prolonged course of illness and disability experienced from such diseases decreases the quality of life for millions of Americans. Chronic conditions lead to multiple outpatient visits and hospitalizations, which can become an extreme economic burden. Many people who suffer from multiple chronic conditions feel they lack the skills to manage their own health.

The Solution:

Participating in a routine physical activity program and chronic disease self-management program can prevent and maintain chronic diseases. The *Healthier Living: Managing Ongoing Health Conditions* program encourages participants to maintain and adapt practical coping strategies. The program focuses on providing mutual support to the participants, thus building their confidence in their ability to manage their health and maintain active lives. After completing the workshops, participants demonstrate significant improvements in their self-reported general health, in aspects such as improved attitude and gained skills. *Healthier Living* does not conflict with existing programs or treatment; it is designed to enhance regular treatment and disease-specific education.

The Program:

Healthier Living includes a series of 2 ½ hour workshops presented over a 6-week period by two trained leaders, one or both of whom are non-health professional with a chronic disease themselves. The curriculum includes workshops and appropriate behavior modifications and coping strategies to enable the participants to manage their chronic diseases and medications and increase physical activity levels. The program enables participants to work on effective communication skills with family, friends, and health professionals.

Subjects covered include: 1) techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain, and isolation, 2) appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility, and endurance, 3) appropriate use of medications, 4) communicating effectively with family, friends, and health professionals, 5) nutrition, and 6) how to evaluate new treatments.

How was the Program Developed?

The Division of Family and Community Medicine in the School of Medicine at Stanford University received a five year research grant from the federal Agency for Health Care Research and Policy and the State of California Tobacco-Related Diseases office. The purpose of the research was to develop and evaluate, through a randomized controlled trial, a community-based self-management program that assists people with chronic illness. The study was completed in 1996.

The process of the program was based on the experience of the investigators and others with self-efficacy, the confidence one has that he or she can master a new skill or affect one's own health. The content of the workshop was the result of focus groups with people with chronic disease, in which the participants discussed which content areas were the most important for them.

How was the Program Evaluated?

Over 1,000 people with heart disease, lung disease, stroke, or arthritis participated in a randomized, controlled test of the Program and were followed for up to three years. Researchers looked for changes in many areas: health status (disability, social/role limitations, pain and physical discomfort, energy/fatigue, shortness of breath, psychological well-being/distress, depression, health distress, self-rated general health), health care utilization (visits to physicians, visits to emergency department, hospital stays, and nights in hospital), self-efficacy (confidence to perform self-management behaviors, confidence to manage disease in general, confidence to achieve outcomes), and self-management behaviors (exercise, cognitive symptom management, mental stress management/relaxation, use of community resources, communication with physician, and advance directives).

The Benefits:

Healthier Living has a strong research base of a variety of randomized control trials, which have consistently demonstrated that the program results in improved quality of life among participants that endure for up to two years. This program has proven beneficial through participants' demonstrated improvements in exercise, cognitive symptom management, and communication with physicians. Additional benefits include improvements in self-reported general health through decreased health distress, fatigue, disability, and social/role activities limitations. These improvements in health have directly led to trends of fewer outpatient visits and hospitalizations, which have the economic advantages of a cost to savings ratio of approximately 1:10. Many studies have shown a decrease in number of hospitalizations and length of hospital stay. Within the Kaiser Permanente System, the savings far outstripped the cost of the program. Furthermore, the data has shown positive results of the program to persist for as long as three years.

It is the process in which the program is taught that makes it effective. Classes are highly participative, where mutual support and success build the participants' confidence in their ability to manage their health and maintain active and fulfilling lives.

AoA Evidence-Based Prevention Initiative - California:

In October 2006, the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA) awarded funding to the California Departments of Aging and Public Health and fifteen other states to improve the health and quality of life for older Americans. These awards supported the dissemination of evidence-based health promotion programs such as *Healthier Living*. The scope of dissemination included community based aging services organizations, such as senior centers, senior housing projects and faith-based organizations. Partners in Care Foundation serves as the Program Office for the California Departments of Aging and Public Health.

The initiative has included a broad collaboration:

- Partners in Care Foundation
- Kaiser Permanente
- California Association of Provider Groups
- Hospitals & Health Systems
- Public Health Departments
- Senior Housing Facilities
- City Parks and Recreation Departments
- Community Clinics
- Area Agencies on Aging, Senior Centers, and Aging Network members
- Community Colleges
- Other Non-Profits

This program is uniquely appropriate for large-scale implementation because its usefulness cuts across all chronic diseases and is particularly impactful for those with multiple chronic conditions. It has also been translated and adapted to be offered in many languages and has proven effective across diversity of ethnicity and income. Rather than requiring separate interventions for each disease, sponsors and their patients, members, and employees with any and all conditions will benefit directly from the healthier behaviors established as a result of the program.

Lay facilitators for the program are certified by attending a 4-day training provided by a Master Trainer. The training to become a Master Trainer is provided by Stanford University. *Healthier Living* has been adopted worldwide and is a standard benefit for Kaiser Permanente members as well as for the British Health Service.

Much progress has been made toward the dissemination of *Healthier Living* in California. This progress, however, must be dramatically accelerated if we are to reach a significant portion of the millions of people coping with major chronic conditions and whose lives could be improved by participating in the program. *Healthier Living* needs to be far more accessible and have a much stronger and diverse community leadership effort to truly impact all adults with chronic conditions.

Bibliography of Key Research Articles:

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