

## Boston Globe (North of Boston Supplement) Advertorial - Published in May of 2007

### Managing a Chronic Illness

#### How Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley Can Help

By Mary Hart

What do arthritis, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes have in common? These are all chronic illnesses that can lessen your quality of life just when you're supposed to be enjoying life the most. Who would want that? Even though your doctor has given you information on how to handle your illness, the second you return home -- or go out to eat with friends if you're a diabetic -- that information can easily be forgotten. It's time to take charge and learn how to manage your chronic illness on your own by learning from peers who have managed their own illnesses.

Of older adults, over 75% are affected by a chronic disease. "At least 50% of these individuals have more than one chronic disease," says Patricia McDermott, Director of Development at Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley in Lawrence. "The numbers are growing in terms of individuals affected by chronic disease and in terms of costs associated with treating these diseases in hospitals and long-term care settings."

Just because you have a chronic disease, however, that doesn't mean that you won't be able to live your life to the fullest. "Having a chronic disease," says Joan Hatem Roy, Director of Clinical Programming, Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley, "doesn't mean that you will be frail and in a wheelchair for the rest of your life. Through our new Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, you can learn how to manage your condition."

This program was first developed at Stanford University Medical School, and is "currently being practiced successfully in communities across the United States and other parts of the world," says McDermott. "This program teaches elders to manage their chronic illness on their own so that they avoid hospitalization and long-term care."

Currently, training is going on for "master trainers," followed by a certification process. "We have Stanford lead trainers here to perform the training," says Hatem Roy, "along with a trainer from the UK and one from Canada. The physician working with us on this program is Dr. Robert Schreiber, Physician in Chief at Hebrew Senior Life. He has helped greatly to bring this issue to the forefront."

Those being trained in the current training/certification process are "representatives from health and human services professions across the state," says McDermott. "This is a guarantee that the program will grow beyond the original boundaries of the Merrimack Valley."

"The master trainers will then go on to train leaders who will lead the workshops of groups of people with chronic illness," says Hatem Roy. "Each group is co-led by two people and at least one leader also has a chronic illness, so that the participants can learn from the leader's personal knowledge with self-managing an illness." These workshops, which are typically six weeks long and meet once a week for two hours, are geared to helping participants gain confidence in their ability to manage the symptoms of their illness and control how their illness affects their lives. Workshops are highly interactive, focusing on helping the participants to learn from each other and share experiences, while also giving support.

Participants in Stanford's Chronic Disease Self-Management Program were found to have a "decrease in their disability; a decrease in hospitalizations; a decrease in subsequent medical costs and an

increase in their quality of life," says Hatem Roy. This program will greatly add in giving adults with a chronic illness greater independence and the ability to keep their active adult life in full swing.

If you are interested in finding out more about this workshop; becoming a group leader; or being in a workshop, contact Joan Hatem Roy, Director of Clinical Programming, Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley at 978-683-7747.