

HealthLink Wellness Newsletter

HealthLink Partners:

**Pharmaceutical Industry Labor-Management Association
Rhode Island Alliance for Retired Americans
Boston University**

March 2008

2008 Alliance for Retired Americans HealthLink Wellness Health Fair Rhode Island Alliance for Retired Americans is the organizer for the event.

WHO: Any retiree/ARA member
WHAT: HealthLink Wellness Health Fair
WHEN: June 23, 2008
WHERE: West Valley Inn, 4 Blossom Street, West Warwick, RI
CONTACT: RI ARA President John A. Pernorio (401) 275-0726

SPACE IS LIMITED, YOU MUST PRE-REGISTER

Join us in this opportunity for all of us to get together in one place since the first health fair. Come in to talk and learn about your health and to socialize. A continental breakfast and/or boxed lunch will be served.

Directions to the West Valley Inn can be obtained on our web site

The Wellness Benefit - Joseph Boffa DDS MPH

In researching the area of wellness benefits, I have found that an increasing number of U.S. companies have begun to offer incentives to employees who take on more responsibility for both health care costs and health choices. Though right now small in number, there is a growing trend for companies to offer incentives to encourage healthier lifestyles among their employees. According to supporters, companies that provide employees access to preventive services and monitoring of chronic conditions without having to travel to doctors' offices can see savings in health care costs, increase in morale and productivity and reduction in absenteeism.

Built into some of these wellness programs are employee incentives such as offering bonuses to employees who exercise regularly or take other steps to maintain their health. This is also part of a trend that if there are documented cost savings to the company then some of that money can be shared as a dollar benefit employees can see in their paycheck. Obviously those companies have come to the conclusion that promoting health among their most valuable asset, their employees, makes business sense.

An interesting study analyzing a General Motors/United Autoworkers Union wellness program known as LifeSteps did indeed document cost savings for both active employees and retirees. Though there were limitations in the availability of program costs, benefits were calculated based on a reduction in rate of increase in medical costs.

For those participants who exhibited an improvement of health status, GM estimated it saved \$226 per person for non-Medicare participants and \$106 dollars for Medicare participants. For the non-Medicare population, 76 percent of the savings was in health services cost and 24 percent in pharmaceutical costs. For the Medicare population, 54 percent of the savings was in medical costs and 46 percent in pharmaceutical costs. GM also estimated that its average plant could save \$350,000 annually in absenteeism cost through participation in what they termed an intensive-level wellness program similar in structure to the HealthLink Wellness project.

HealthLink Wellness was designed to afford retirees the opportunity to take charge of their health. However, in contrast with employer based benefits, we have developed what can be best described as a “community benefit”. We know from our surveys and focus groups, most of you have a primary care physician who monitors your health. HealthLink Wellness provides opportunities for additional health monitoring and participation in wellness activities such as walking clubs and health education programs. It’s activities were specifically designed to take place in a friendlier, local community setting. That is why we established six screening centers in Rhode Island and one in central Massachusetts. The union and VFW halls, Elks lodges and church hall were specifically selected as local community social settings where you can seek health information and follow-up among your friends and neighbors in what I have described in the past as a total community effort.

One of the economic benefits passed on to you was that the health screenings and health education modules were free. Our ultimate goal is to determine if investment in the HealthLink Wellness approach can yield potential net cost savings to the Medicare program. We have shown in the past that HealthLink members over a series of screenings exhibited improvements in blood glucose and cholesterol levels and blood pressure. Ultimately, both Medicare and Congress would be interested in determining if that can translate into actual health care cost savings. If it does, then some of those savings could be passed onto the retiree. It can be in the form of reduced Medicare premiums or a small cash stipend. I have referred to the small stipend as a “wellness dividend”.

Just as in well designed employer based wellness benefits with incentives built in this would be a benefit driven by actual health behavior. It is different from other health benefits. In all other health benefits the primary qualification is you are a member of a group i.e. a particular company or Medicare. Most health benefits are established to help defray the cost of health services to treat disease once it occurs. With the true wellness benefit there is an additional standard or burden for qualification. You qualify only when you take and maintain positive action. One of the consequences of that positive action is a better quality of life and in the long run a reduction in health care cost and economic burden to you and your family.

HealthLink Members - if you would like to invite a friend (s) to the health fair who is not a member then have them go to the HealthLink web site to either register on-line or you can obtain a copy of a registration form for them to fill out and mail in. The web site is:

www.NewEnglandSenior.com

e-mail address: info@newenglandsenior.com

Chickenpox, Not Just a Childhood Disease — Mark Schwager, MD

If you thought chickenpox was something only kids had to worry about you may be surprised! The chicken pox rash that kept you home from school for a week in 4th grade gradually faded away and although the rash disappeared, the cause of the rash, a virus called varicella zoster, has been keeping you company since your bout of chicken pox those many years ago. Once you have had chicken pox, the virus lies dormant in the nerves of your spinal chord. This dormant virus is asleep but not dead, kept in check by your immune system. As you age, your immune system also ages and may allow the varicella virus to awaken from its slumber and become reactivated. This reactivation does not result in another bout of chicken pox but rather a painful skin rash with blisters called shingles or by the medical term, zoster.

The first signs of shingles may be itching, tingling and burning. A few days later a rash of fluid-filled blisters appears, usually on one side of the body or face. The rash usually occurs in a narrow band. Shingles can be painful, and when the blisters rupture can create a messy, oozing rash. Although the rash usually heals within two to four weeks, some sufferers experience residual nerve pain for months or years, a condition called post-herpetic neuralgia (PHN). Each year, about 1,000,000 individuals in the U. S. develop shingles, or herpes zoster. Approximately 20% of these shingles patients, or 200,000 individuals, go on to suffer from post-herpetic neuralgia. The risk of developing shingles increases with age, with the highest incidence in people over 75 years. Your lifetime risk of developing shingles in between may be as high as 50% if you live to age 85.

If you develop shingles, see your doctor right away. Treatment with antiviral medications can reduce the severity and duration of zoster when a seven to ten day course is started within 72 hours of the appearance of the characteristic rash. When long-term nerve pain (post-herpetic neuralgia) complicates a bout of shingles there are several drug therapies, which may help to reduce discomfort.

Since 2005 the vaccine, Zostavax, has been available and can reduce your risk of developing shingles by about 50%. A single injection in the upper arm is recommended for people age 60 or older. The vaccine is a live but weakened chickenpox virus, which stimulates your immune system to keep in check the dormant chickenpox virus asleep in the spinal nerves. Serious side effects of the vaccine are rare but a small number of vaccine recipients develop headache and/or pain at the injection site for a day or two.

Know Your Rights

The Medicare Rights Center (MRC) provides hotline counseling services to people with Medicare around the country. It is dedicated to help you if you have questions or need help getting Medicare to cover your care. MRC is the largest independent source of information and assistance in the United States for people with Medicare. Founded in 1989, MRC helps older adults and people with disabilities get good, affordable health care.

Web Site: www.medicarerights.org/

520 Eighth Avenue - 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10018

800-333-4114 (toll free)

Whole Wheat Pasta with Vegetarian Sauce

From the American Heart Association Low-fat, Low-cholesterol Cookbook (2nd Edition)

Vegetable oil spray
1 tsp olive oil
6 green onions (green & white parts chopped)
1 large red or white onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced or 2 tsp bottled minced garlic
1 16 ounce can low sodium kidney beans
1 16 ounce can no-salt added tomatoes
8 ounces fresh mushrooms, sliced
2 medium red, green or yellow bell peppers, chopped
2 stalks celery with leaves, chopped
1 cup water
1/2 cup dry red wine
1/4 cup minced fresh parsley
1 Tbsp chopped fresh oregano or 1 tsp dried
1 Tbsp chopped fresh basil or 1/2 tsp dried
1 bay leaf
Freshly ground pepper to taste
12 ounces dried whole wheat pasta
4 ounces shredded nonfat or part-skim mozzarella cheese (about 1 cup)

For sauce, spray a large saucepan with vegetable oil spray. Heat over medium-high heat. Add olive oil and swirl to coat bottom of pan. When oil is heated, add onions and garlic, sauté until soft, 2-3 minutes. Add remaining sauce ingredients and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, covered for about 1 hour, stirring frequently. Remove bay leaf. Meanwhile, cook pasta according to package directions, omitting oil and salt, drain. Serve sauce over hot pasta, sprinkle with mozzarella. Serves 6

Nutrient Analysis

Calories	336	Saturated Fat	0 g
Protein	21 g	Polyunsaturated Fat	1 g
Carbohydrate	62 g	Monounsaturated Fat	1 g
Total Fat	2 g	Cholesterol	0 mg
		Sodium	164 mg