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**Health Fair Screening Results**

**Joseph Boffa DDS MPH - Director HealthLink Wellness**  
**Mark Schwager MD - Medical Director HealthLink Wellness**

Last June our Health Fair and rally was a great success in terms of turnout of both HealthLink members and invited guests. We have had nothing but positive feedback from our members though at first there was some concern about the waiting lines for various screenings. The health fair is a much larger event than our local regional screenings so most members took the waiting lines in stride. They were patient in obtaining their screening results and the guidance that we could provide.

There were some firsts at this health fair. After each individual completed his or her screening, we made available both pharmacists, nurse counselors and our medical director to review results and provide immediate advice and guidance. We also set up a table with a bank of laptop computers to read in screening data and calculate for each individual their Risk Profile Index (RPI). Most members will remember that this is a single heart disease risk measure that represents all screening tests combined into one composite report card type score. It was developed by the Framingham Heart Study.

From a health and wellness perspective our members have maintained their progress to date but there are indications that we are now at a stage where we will have to start new initiatives in order to build on past successes. In terms of specific measures, 80% of health fair participants exhibited blood glucose at acceptable normal levels as compared to 51% during the 2001 health fair. In addition, 78% had normal total cholesterol as compared to 48% in 2001. Approximately 75% of the individuals who attended the June health fair had been members since 2001 so we have a fair indication that our members are maintaining the progress they made over the years.

However HealthLink is at a stage in which we have not improved satisfactorily in one major area of chronic disease. That has to do with blood pressure. The table below indicates we have made improvements in this vital area of concern but there is still more ground to be covered:

**Table 1 - Blood Pressure in 2001 vs. 2008**

Blood Pressure	2001	2008
Normal	6%	12%
Pre-Hypertension	33%	43%
Hypertension	61%	46%

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Our progress so far has been in moving a substantial portion of our members from full hypertension into the pre-hypertension category. There yet remains a need to move more people into the classification of normal blood pressure.

Having stated that, what are the dynamics of this problem? We have written about this in past newsletters. Last November we published an article "Do not forget about your BMI". In it we pointed out that the BMI does have a strong relationship with blood pressure. Our 2008 screening confirms once again what was stated last November, as BMI increases so does blood pressure. Those who were screened last June as hypertensive on the average had a BMI of 32.1. Remember a BMI of less than 25 is considered normal body weight, 25-29 overweight and 30 or more is considered obese. Not paying attention to BMI will make it very difficult to control blood pressure.

Where are we now? As we looked at our data in a little more detail an interesting aspect of our wellness endeavors seems to be taking shape. By looking at RPI for 2001 and 2008 we get better sense of the dynamics involved and our future challenges. RPI is broken down into three categories, average, above average and elevated. The elevated category indicates an individual at high risk of heart disease complications and should be followed up by their primary care physician.

**Table 2 - Risk Profile Index in 2001 vs. 2008**

Risk Profile Index (RPI)	2001	2008
Average Risk	18%	30%
Above Average Risk	41%	29%
Elevated Risk	41%	41%

The RPI risk category that has not shown improvement since 2001 is the elevated or high risk category. Our overall progress was primarily among those who were in the above average category. We are now at a stage of our program in which we will not make further progress unless that 41% of high risk individuals start making substantial progress. A more careful examination of those high risk individuals indicates on average a total cholesterol of 181 and blood glucose of 101. Both results are in acceptable ranges and does not seem to be the cause of their high risk status. On the other hand, for those same individuals 77% are classified as having high blood pressure. Another 21% are in the pre-hypertension category. Only 2% of the individual in the elevated risk or high risk category for the RPI exhibited normal blood pressure. Table 3 looks at only the 41% of individuals who last June were in the elevated or high risk category for RPI.

**Table 3 - Blood Pressure for Elevated/High Risk Individuals in 2008**

Blood Pressure	2008
Normal	2%
Pre-Hypertension	21%
Hypertension	77%

We will need to start discussing additional strategies as to how to make substantial improvement with those high risk individuals. In future issues of this newsletter we will discuss some potential solutions to what is right now a leveling off of progress and how to move our agenda forward. **But we strongly urge all members to please review your screening results, especially those of you who are in the elevated category, set some meaningful targets for BMI and blood pressure before our next round of local screenings scheduled for later in the fall. Also, for high risk people, discuss your results with your physician. That is the only way you will take control of your health.**

## HealthLink Wellness Health Fair – A Great Success

**John A. Pernorio – President Rhode Island ARA**  
**Dr. Joseph Boffa – Director HealthLink Wellness Program**

The Health Fair held on June 23<sup>rd</sup> was a great success. It was the first time since the 2001 health fair that all members of HealthLink Wellness had come together at the same place. There were also individuals who were new to the program on that day. Approximately 265 HealthLink members and guests participated in the day's events not only to participate in the health screenings but also to commiserate with fellow members and greet and talk to invited guests from Rhode Island and Washington D.C.

### *Congressman Patrick J. Kennedy is greeted by HealthLink Members*



We would like to make special mention of our brothers and sisters of United Nurses and Allied Professionals Inc. for their support and help in planning for the health fair. Several of their members volunteered to help us with the blood pressure and BMI screenings and counseling to review members' results. We do appreciate their dedication, not only to their profession, but also to the community.

The original design for the HealthLink Wellness agenda was to have regional screenings at local community settings based on the community benefit concept. We knew from our surveys and focus groups our members do take seriously and are motivated to take control of their health. HealthLink Wellness provides opportunities for additional health monitoring beyond what they receive from their doctor and opportunity to participate in wellness activities such as walking clubs and health education programs. Its activities are specifically designed to take place in a friendlier local community setting. The purpose is not only to reach out to the local community but to form the building blocks of a culture of prevention and wellness.

The health fair and rally has a different purpose. It is a time for not only HealthLink members to come together but for the sponsoring organizations to pull together for this one event. It is very important for our sponsoring organizations to keep current with their tie in with both the needs and goals of our agenda. Organizational support from groups such as the Rhode Island ARA, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO and funding from PhRMA were critical in the development of the HealthLink Wellness agenda. The agenda of the health fair still involves chronic disease same as the local screenings but because of the larger numbers involved cancer screenings become more practical. Tests that were added to our list at this year's health fair were PSA testing for prostate cancer and oral cancer screening. In fact the oral health/cancer screening was so popular with our members that Dr. Boffa, Director of the HealthLink Wellness Program, and fellow Boston University faculty member, Dr. Ana Karina Mascarenhas are discussing the option of incorporating oral health programs as a regular feature of our ongoing local regional screenings

Besides the expanded screening agenda, the health fair is also an opportunity for members to meet others who are active at different regional screening centers, to socialize and share ideas relating to the concept of "Taking Control", the motto of the HealthLink Wellness program. At the local community screenings we literally mean members need to take control of their health. We help by offering a local community setting for the basic set of screenings for chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and elevated cholesterol. The opportunity is for a one on one help and guidance. In addition at each location we offer health education workshops and walking clubs to enhance each member's ability to follow the path of prevention. The agenda at the health fair does include the same set of basic medical screenings.

At this health fair we also invited sponsors to have an exhibit table. Eli Lilly, Our Lady of Fatima Hospital, The Point, Absolute Respiratory Care, Pace, Home Stead Senior Care, Care New England Home Health, Mass MedLine & Butler Hospital all had tables at the health fair.

At the regional health fair **"Taking Control"** has an additional meaning. Our goal is also to invite leaders in health, labor and politics to join us and to meet with our members. In order for our members to take control of programs such as Medicare, so important to their lives, they need to be able to converse with leaders from many fields to obtain a firm understanding of the issues involved.

At the June health fair representatives from the Rhode Island AFL-CIO were in attendance. Representative Patrick J. Kennedy took time from his busy schedule to join us. We should add he was instrumental in obtaining the original funding for HealthLink's CDC funded project and has consistently been a strong proponent of prevention. Also, Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, who supports the HealthLink Wellness project, had some of his staff attend. Mr. Edward Coyle, Executive Director, Alliance for Retired Americans and Carl "Hands" Poulette, Eastern Regional Director, Department of Retiree Affairs, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, both flew in from Washington D.C. to be in attendance. Activities with our guests included a video recording of panel discussions among HealthLink staff and invited guests. The panel discussions will be aired on the program "Labor Vision" which is part of the State Interconnection available on Cox channel fourteen. We would also like to thank the Teamsters Local 170 Retirees Club from Worcester, Mass for their participation.

### **Below Panel Discussion**

**Left to Right: Roger Boudreau, Institute for Labor Studies & Research  
Edward Coyle, Executive Director, Alliance for Retired Americans  
Dr. Joseph Boffa, RI ARA Medical Programs Director  
Carl "Hands" Poulette, Eastern Regional Director,  
International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Dept. of Retiree Affairs**



*To see more scenes from the Health Fair go to our website: [www.NewEnglandSenior.com](http://www.NewEnglandSenior.com)*