

SENIORGRAM: SENDING A MESSAGE ON SENIOR ISSUES

Local elders are hit hard by the opioid crisis

by Barbara Bodzin, Executive Director, LifePath

There is an epidemic in our communities impacting people of all ages regardless of class, race or education level: opioid abuse. And elders are particularly vulnerable.

A growing number of older Americans are becoming addicted to prescription drugs such as OxyContin and Vicodin, both of which are classified as opioids. Elders have an increased likelihood of experiencing pain and physical illness and are prescribed these highly addictive pain relievers more frequently than younger people. Now recognized as a serious issue in the medical community, organizations including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are working with healthcare professionals to consider safer pain management options for elders in particular.

Addiction to opioids is only one of many ways in which older adults are impacted by the opioid epidemic.

The increasing number of grandparents raising the children of parents who are addicted or supporting an adult child or grandchild who is addicted can be directly attributed to this epidemic. There has been an observed rise in elder abuse and financial exploitation also associated to the opioid crisis as more adult children with addiction issues are moving back in with their parents, who can then become targets for financial, physical and emotional abuse. Over the last five years the number of elder abuse reports in Massachusetts has increased by 37% due in no small part to this epidemic.

Elders are unwittingly supplying those seeking easy access to opioids as well. Medication theft by individuals seeking opportunistic situations has, not surprisingly, escalated significantly in recent years. Caregivers and family members alike are targeting older adults, who often have supplies of opioid painkillers in their medicine cabinets. We know that most incidents of prescription theft are committed by someone the victim knows well and who has easy access to the home.

We want to encourage elders in our community to educate themselves about the medicines in their home, to properly dispose of any opioids no longer being taken and carefully secure those in current use. Speak with your physician about your medications. Inventory your medicines. Lock or otherwise secure your home and your medications to reduce the risk of medication theft.

Our rural communities have dedicated significant resources targeted towards tackling this problem. Locally, the Opioid Task Force can be credited with spearheading initiatives, raising awareness and looking at the underlying causes contributing to this epidemic. Guidance and resources are available. Please call LifePath at 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259 and ask to speak with a resource specialist or email info@lifepathma.org. We can steer you in the right direction to get assistance for yourself or someone you know.

YOUR CHOICE TO STAY AT HOME

“CHOICES service plans allow for those with significant care needs to receive that care at home as opposed to in a facility setting,” says Cindy Ray, Home Care program director. “Many of our success stories are CHOICES consumers who have remained at home for years with LifePath services.”

Community Choices is an option for those at risk of needing skilled nursing facility placement. If you or someone you help care for is already in a nursing facility, Community Choices can help provide services necessary to transition back to the community.

Community Choices may offer:

- help to remain living at home while enjoying a richer quality of life
- comprehensive, enhanced in-home service plans
- personalized care plans
- respite for caregivers
- extensive case management, including home visits
- help accessing resources and coordinating services to maintain community living
- equipment and home adaptations to increase independence (ramps, grab bars, etc.)
- transitional services to return home from a nursing facility
- possible funding for basic needs like deposits for an apartment, home furnishings and more



For more information on Community Choices, please call 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
 Or email anytime: info@LifePathMA.org. Read more at LifePathMA.org.

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ELDERS FILL UP ON FRESH FRUITS AND VEGGIES FROM LOCAL FARMERS MARKETS

Picture this: You sit down to dinner on Friday, and your table is filled with the sweet summer scent of basil. You decide to have fruit with breakfast on Saturday, and the berries you pop into your mouth offer a blast of flavor because they were picked by your local farmer this morning. Your Monday is boosted with a lunchtime salad as colorful as a rainbow: bright slices of red radishes, shredded orange carrots, a chopped yellow bell pepper, a green salad mix, blueberries, and purple pickled beets.

Where did you get all this bounty? Your local farmers market, of course!

Farmers markets are a great place to shop for fresh, locally-grown produce and farm-raised meats and dairy. Many of our local farmers markets are open throughout the growing season and some are even open year-round. Thanks to special resources like the Healthy Incentive Program and Senior Farmers Market Coupons, locally grown food is becoming more accessible.

You can double the value of your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits when you make certain purchases at certain farmers markets, thanks to the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which will continue this summer. The program helps families afford more fresh, canned, dried, and frozen fruits and vegetables without added salts, sugars, fats, or oils.

HIP adds the amount of your purchase instantly back to your Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, up to a certain value each month. If you are a household of one or two people and spend \$40 of your SNAP benefits at a HIP retailer, you will earn \$40 credit back



Experts recommend eating a wide variety of colorful vegetables. When you visit your local farmers market, try out something new, such as purple asparagus, colorful Easter egg radishes, or Romanesco broccoli, which is prepared like cauliflower and has a delicate and nutty taste.

in your SNAP account. For a household of three to five people, the amount is \$60, and it is \$80 for a household of six or more. Your receipt will show the amount of additional SNAP dollars you have earned. Franklin County and North Quabbin farmers markets participating in HIP include those in the towns of Ashfield, Bernardston, Colrain, Greenfield, Northfield, Orange Shelburne Falls, and Turners Falls.

In addition to farmers markets, some farm stands, mobile markets, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) are also HIP retailers. To find more information or other HIP retailers near you, visit www.mass.gov/hip

for a directory, call Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline at 1-800-645-8333, or look for the HIP logo.

More information about the Senior Farmers Market Coupons through the Farmers Market Nutrition Program can be found online at www.mass.gov/farmers-market-nutrition-program.

CISA (Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture) offers a complete directory of farmers markets, available online at www.buylocalfood.org. To request a hard copy, contact the CISA office at 413-665-7100 or info@buylocalfood.org.

The Nutrition Program at LifePath operates many senior dining centers and senior luncheon clubs, as well as the Meals on Wheels program, across Franklin County and the North Quabbin region. Home Care and other programs may offer assistance with grocery shopping. To learn more, contact LifePath at 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259 or info@LifePathMA.org. Read more at LifePathMA.org.

HEALTHY HABITS CAN LENGTHEN LIFE

Have you heard the advice to exercise, choose a healthy diet, keep a lean weight, never smoke, and limit alcohol?

Researchers wanted to find out whether people who follow this advice live longer than those who don't.

So, they compared lifespan and other data from thousands of adults with all five of these healthy habits to those without. People in the healthy habits group got at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. They ate the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, and healthy fats. And they limited salt, sugary drinks, trans fat, and red and processed meats. They also limited

alcohol. Women had no more than one drink each day and men no more than two drinks. They also maintained a normal weight and didn't smoke.

The people in the other group didn't exercise, have a healthy diet, or limit drinking. They smoked and were overweight.

Based on the results, the researchers estimated that a 50-year-old woman who had all five habits would live, on average, to age 93. In contrast, if she didn't have any of these habits, she would live on average to age 79.

For a 50-year-old man, the average lifespan was about 88 years old with healthy behaviors and only 76 years without.

"This study underscores the importance of following healthy lifestyle habits for improving longevity in the U.S. population," says Dr. Frank B. Hu of Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, senior author of the study. You can learn more about having a healthy diet at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/eat/calories.htm.

The Healthy Living Program at LifePath can help you develop healthy habits. Free workshops on chronic disease, pain, and diabetes self-management; balance and exercise; and healthy eating help people with one or more chronic diseases improve their lives. Learn to take small steps to reach your big goals. Find out more online at lifepathma.org/events/healthy-living-workshops or by calling 413-773-5555 or 978-544-2259.

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