

EXTENDED CARE LINK

*Cheri Benander, MSN, RN, CHC, NHCE-C
Health Services Consultant, HealthTechS3*

HEALTH PROMOTION IN THE OLDER ADULT

Promoting healthy lifestyles is important at all ages, but is sometimes overlooked in older adults. According to Healthy People 2020, "...growth in the number of older adults is unprecedented."¹ The US population aged 65 and older reached 14.5% in 2014 and is expected to reach 23.5% by 2060.² In 2015, it was estimated that between 80-90 percent of people who were over 65 suffered from at least one chronic disease.³ This statistic should not lead one to assume that it is too late to initiate programs for older adults but rather encourage health promotion to inhibit the development of additional diseases.



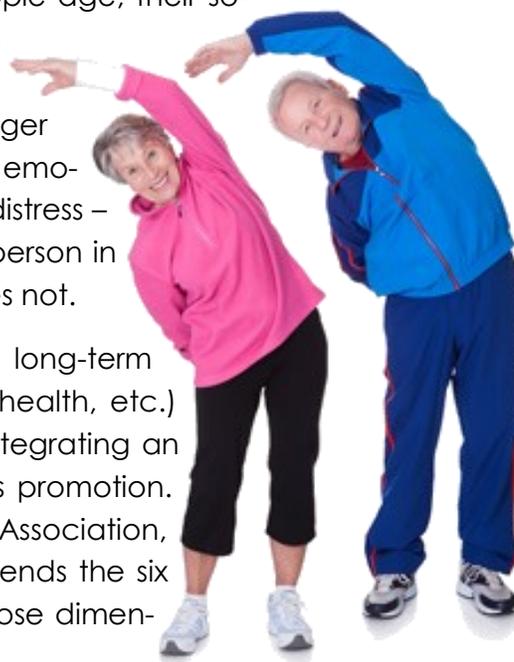
In 2015, there were approximately 8,357,100 people who received support from various long term care agencies annually and approximately 63% were 65 or older.⁴ Given the number of people accessing this support, it stands to reason that developing programs to promote wellness across the long term care continuum could touch multiple lives and have a tremendous impact on the development of chronic disease. Too many times, the focus of long-term care is on the problems and the deficits that elders have. This focus "...limits the exploration of individual strengths, thereby compounding the risk for vulnerability to diminished health and well-being."⁵

Evidence suggests that "...exercising, quitting smoking, and limiting alcohol consumption, participating in learning activities and integrating in the community can help to inhibit the development of many diseases and prevent the loss of functional capacity, thus improving quality of life and lengthening life expectancy."⁶ In order to encourage these lifestyle changes, we must first understand that older adults have different reasons for choosing to maintain or improve their health status. These reasons can be quite diverse and these individuals need to either take part in or make their own decisions related to their activities. At each stage of life, how we present the information has an effect on how it is received and if it motivates those that we are trying to reach.

Healthcare can be extremely complex and confusing, for that reason we need to ensure that information provided is easy to understand and promotes decision making that enhances their well-being. According to the 2015 World Report on Aging and Health, it is important that we tailor healthcare messages in ways that they can accept. Some examples from the report include; ⁷

- ◆ Use communication processes that rely on heuristics and intuition. These processes may be more effective than those that rely on large amounts of information processing and thinking.
- ◆ Make messages more relevant to older people. Targeting messages (for example, about the importance of physical activity in later years) can make the message appear more relevant and appealing.
- ◆ Trial positive messaging for older adults. Many older adults are motivated to avoid processing negative information. Emphasizing gains to promote preventive behaviors, (such as eating a healthy diet) and the use of testing (such as screening for cancer), may be more effective in older adults.
- ◆ Tailor messages to specific older people. Matching information to an individual's characteristics can influence how older people think and feel about a health issue; this can be more effective, especially if the message addresses how by modifying behavior an older person may become more emotionally satisfied.
- ◆ Manage emotional distress. Emotional distress can be both a catalyst for and a saboteur of change; hence, it needs to be managed successfully to encourage behavioral change and maintenance of that change.
- ◆ Consider an older person's social support. As people age, their social networks decrease in size and the networks may be more effective at promoting stability than change. Social support can facilitate or endanger behavioral change – for example by providing emotional support and helping to manage emotional distress – or by discouraging change – for example if one person in a couple wants to stop smoking and the other does not.

In addition to messaging, wellness programs in long-term care agencies (nursing homes, assisted living, home health, etc.) should take into consideration a holistic approach. Integrating an exercise program in itself does not constitute wellness promotion. According to Jean Montague from the Senior Fitness Association, a holistic wellness model integrates, balances, and blends the six dimensions of wellness into program development. Those dimen-



sions include emotional, social, intellectual, physical, spiritual, and vocational. "Research shows that for many aging individuals, participation in whole – person health programs slows the aging process and promotes independence."⁸

Emotional activities promote self-esteem and encourages enthusiasm about one's life. Encouraging the ability to manage feelings and behaviors and cope with stress is the focus of this dimension of wellness.⁹ Intellectual wellness promotes the use of the mind, encouraging individuals to think creatively and rationally and expand knowledge and skills.¹⁰ Activities that emphasize the maintenance of healthy relationships and encouraging harmony within the family promote social wellness.¹¹

Many nursing homes provide spiritual activities through the scheduling of various "church services" by participating religious organizations. Spiritual wellness is also about seeking meaning and purpose in life and can involve additional activities that promote a strong sense of personal values and ethics. Vocational activities emphasize giving and receiving. These types of activities "...encourage goal setting for one's personal enrichment...and [are] linked to the creation of a positive attitude about personal and professional growth."¹²

The final dimension, is one that long-term care facilities tend to focus on the most when considering the promotion of health, the physical dimension. Participation in these types of activities strengthen muscles, cardiovascular endurance and flexibility, and are often focused towards individual abilities.¹³

Health promotion is important at every stage of life. For older adults, wellness programs are important and should not be overlooked. Evaluate the message you're sending and try tailoring messages to those you are trying to reach. Take into account the six dimensions of wellness to develop a holistic program that will improve the overall health and wellness of older adults.



¹ Healthy People 2020. (x). Older Adults. Available from <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/older-adults>

² Indem

³ Royer, R.A. (2015, December) Managing chronic conditions in older adults. Available from http://www.providermagazine.com/archives/2015_Archives/Pages/1215/Managing-Chronic-Conditions-In-Older-Adults-.aspx

⁴ National Center on Caregiving: Family Care Giver Alliance. (2015). Selected Long-Term Care Statistics. Available from <https://www.caregiver.org/print/45>

⁵ McMahon, S. & Fleury, J. (2012). Wellness in older adults: A Concept Analysis. Para#3 Available from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3326391/>

⁶ Golinowska, S., Groot, W., Bajj, P., & Pavlova, M. (2016). Health promotion targeting older people. Para #3. Available from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5016724/>

⁷ World Health Organization (WHO). (2015). World Report on Ageing and Health. Available from http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/186463/1/9789240694811_eng.pdf?ua=1

⁸ Montague, J. (2007). Whole-person Wellness for Vital Living, part 1, para 5. Available from https://www.seniorfitness.net/Whole_Person_Wellness.htm

⁹ Indem.

¹⁰ Indem.

¹¹ Indem.

¹² Indem. Part 3 para 6

¹³ Indem.

HealthTechS3's LTC Consulting Services are intended to be educational in nature and are not intended to identify potential compliance violations. The LTC Consulting Services may include advice and recommendations, but the ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding Client's compliance program and related processes, policies and procedures, including without limitation, the decision to further investigate, consult original source materials or notify qualified healthcare regulatory counsel for specific guidance remains with Client as the owner and operator of its business.

For more information, please contact Cheri Benander:

Cell: 307-202-0315

Main: 615-309-6053

Fax: 615-370-2859

cheri.benander@healthtechs3.com

5110 Maryland Way, Suite 200 | Brentwood, TN 37027

www.healthtechs3.com

HealthTechS3 is an award-winning healthcare consulting, executive recruiting, interim executive placement, and hospital management firm based in Brentwood, Tennessee with clients across the United States. We are dedicated to the goal of improving performance, achieving compliance, reducing costs, and ultimately improving patient care. Leveraging consultants with deep healthcare industry experience, HealthTechS3 provides actionable insights and guidance that supports informed decision making and drives efficiency in operational performance.

BUILDING LEADERS | TRANSFORMING HOSPITALS | IMPROVING CARE