

OREGON PUBLIC HEALTH DIVISION • OREGON HEALTH AUTHORITY

LIVING WELL: HELPING PATIENTS HELP THEMSELVES

Every health care provider has experienced that sinking feeling when a patient admits he or she hasn't been following a prescribed treatment regimen. This is especially disappointing when non-adherence is complicating the patient's ability to manage multiple chronic conditions. It makes you want to channel Dr. Perry Cox of 'Scrubs' fame and beg your patients to "help me to help you".

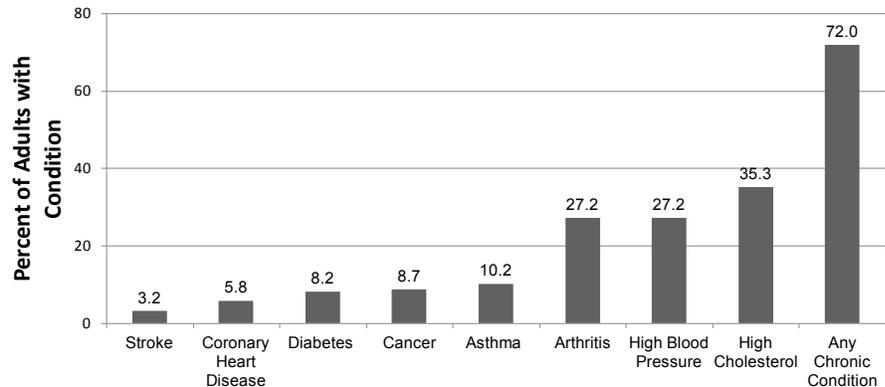
But there is a better way than resorting to a Dr. Cox rant. You know who figured it out? Stanford. Sure, their mascot is a giant pine tree with legs, but the folks at the Stanford University School of Medicine are really smart. They put their heads together and developed the Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, which is a community workshop series designed to help people learn skills to manage their chronic health conditions, and be better prepared for clinical visits.

We in Oregon knew a good thing when we saw it, including evidence of the program's effectiveness and potential for cost savings, as you'll see below. So we decided to adopt the program (albeit with a new name; we are Oregon, after all). Here, the program is called "Living Well with Chronic Conditions."

**A CHRONIC DISEASE CRESCENDO**

In Oregon, 72 percent of adults have one of the following chronic conditions: arthritis, asthma, cancer, diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol\* (Figure 1). As Oregon's population continues to age, the number of people living with one or more chronic condition is expected to increase\* (Figure 2). As the "Gray Tsunami" of baby boomers rushes in, the additional people suffering from chronic conditions will likely be added to patient rosters. And, no surprise, this trend is costly. Nationally, the 27 percent of Americans with two or more chronic health

Figure 1. Prevalence of chronic conditions among Oregon adults, 2009

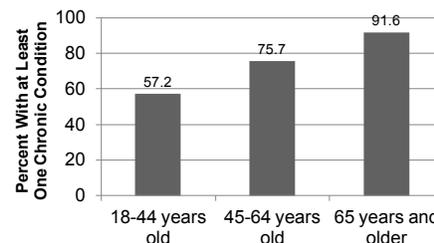


conditions account for 66 percent of health care costs.<sup>1</sup>

**HELP US TO HELP YOU**

Let's be honest. Without some help, health care providers won't be able to ideally manage all the chronic health problems their patients have as the population with chronic diseases grows. There just isn't enough time. Patients need to learn how to use medications correctly, how to work through problems as they arise (like pain, fatigue, frustration and depression) and how to eat well and be physically active. That's a lot to deal with during a 10 minute visit. To manage this impending crush of patients with multiple chronic health problems, self-management of chronic conditions needs to become a standard prescription for patients. This approach will help patients understand how to work as "partners" with their health care providers.

Figure 2. Prevalence of chronic conditions among Oregon adults by age, 2009



Note: Chronic conditions included are arthritis, asthma, cancer, coronary heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and stroke

**THE PROOF IS IN THE (LOW CALORIE) PUDDING**

Living Well has proven to be an important tool for patients with chronic conditions. A meta-analysis conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that Living Well has a significant effect in the following areas:

- self-efficacy;
- health distress;
- social/role limitations;
- aerobic exercise;
- cognitive symptom management; and
- days or nights spent in the hospital.

These benefits persisted between four and 12 months post-intervention.<sup>2</sup>

**SAVING SERIOUS BUCKS**

A recent Oregon State University study looking at 3,919 participants in Living Well programs in Oregon from August 2005 through December 2009 found that: an estimated 557 emergency department visits were avoided, saving \$634,980; and 2,783 hospital days were avoided, saving more than \$6.5 million. Should Living Well reach 5 percent of Oregon's adult population with a chronic condition, it is possible that 11,119 emergency department visits and 55,593 hospital days could be avoided, saving more than \$100 million in health care expenditures.<sup>3</sup>

**WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CLASS IS IN?**

Living Well workshops take place over six weeks, with one 2.5-hour session held each week, and are open to anyone of any age with long-term health conditions. Most classes are offered to groups

\* Oregon Health Authority. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. 2009



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of 10 to 15 people. They are hosted by community organizations and taught by trained leaders, many of whom have chronic conditions themselves.

Participants in Living Well learn how to navigate the healthcare system, including:

- appropriate use of the health care system;
- how to communicate with their providers;
- how to prepare for a provider visit;
- medication management;
- goal setting; and
- action planning.

Participants also learn how to deal with lifestyle issues, including:

- fatigue;
- healthy eating;
- exercise;
- coping with depression and anxiety related to chronic health conditions; and
- handling problems like frustration, pain and isolation.

Finally, participants learn how to incorporate specific techniques into their daily lives, including:

- breathing techniques and guided imagery to reduce stress;
- exercise for improving and maintaining strength, flexibility and endurance;
- methods for taking medications safely and reducing their side effects;
- approaches to communicating with family members, friends and health professionals; and
- methods for evaluating health treatments.

Living Well does not replace medical management of chronic conditions, but provides patients the tools they need to follow through on recommen-

dations made by their providers when they leave the office.

**HOW DO I GET WITH THE PROGRAM?**

The majority of participants in Living Well have heard about the program through their health care providers. With workshops offered in 27 of Oregon's 36 counties and growing, there's likely a program available near you (See "Getting Started" below) (Figure 3). Plus, it's low cost: Due to grant support, most Living Well workshops are either free or cost up to \$60 per person; many have scholarships available for participants who cannot afford to pay.

So help us to help you and help your patients help themselves.

**GETTING STARTED**

- Living Well website: [www.healthoregon.org/livingwell](http://www.healthoregon.org/livingwell)

- Living Well contact information: 1-888-576-7414; email, [living.well@state.or.us](mailto:living.well@state.or.us).

**REFERENCES**

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Multiple chronic conditions: A strategic framework. 2010. See: [www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/mcc/mcc\\_framework.pdf](http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/mcc/mcc_framework.pdf). (Accessed: 26 July 2011).
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Sorting through the evidence for the Arthritis Self-Management Program and Chronic Disease Self-Management Program. 2011. See: [www.cdc.gov/arthritis/docs/ASMP-executive-summary.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/docs/ASMP-executive-summary.pdf). (Accessed: 26 July 2011).
3. Bobbjerg, VE and Kingston, SJ. Program impact report: Oregon's Living Well with Chronic Conditions. 2010. See "Living Well Data Report" under the Publications header: <http://public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/ChronicDisease/LivingWell/Pages/pubs.aspx> (Accessed: 26 July 2011).

Figure 3. Number of organizations providing Living Well Workshops, 2005–2010

