

Boning up on good health promotion

by Mark Collins

They are diseases that can sneak up on you and may not receive top of mind attention like cancer or heart disease. But if keeping bones healthy to prevent arthritis and osteoporosis isn't at the top of your community's wellness list, it should be.

According to the Atlanta-based Arthritis Foundation, there are more than 100 different types of conditions in the arthritis family that affect joints as well as other parts of the body. Arthritis is also one of the most prevalent chronic health problems and the nation's most common cause of disability. An estimated 50 million adults in the U.S. have been diagnosed with some form of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia.

Washington, D.C.-based National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) reports that up to 44 million Americans either have osteoporosis or are at risk of developing osteoporosis. Further, it's estimated that more than half of all women older than 50 will break a bone because of osteoporosis. Nearly 25% of men will as well.

Arthritis and related rheumatic conditions cost the U.S. economy a staggering amount: \$128 billion annually. In 2005, osteoporosis was responsible for \$19 billion in costs and an estimated two million fractures. By 2025, experts predict that osteoporosis will be responsible for approximately three million fractures and \$25.3 billion in annual costs.

May marks Arthritis Awareness Month and National Osteoporosis Awareness and Prevention Month. Louisville, Kentucky-based Norton Healthcare, a Vericom client, is doing something about it as a part of their 10 event, "Parts in Motion" series in 2011.

Their May 23rd seminar entitled, "Free Yourself from Arthritis Pain," is being widely publicized. "We promote in a variety of ways including local television and radio, our magazine, 'Get Healthy' and through social media," explained Betty Hart, Norton Healthcare's Marketing Manager for System Projects.

Norton is also taking advantage of the fact that millions of Americans now qualify for free preventive care, including bone-density scans for women at risk for osteoporosis, hearing-loss tests for newborn babies and depression screening for adolescents. This new provision was included in the new health law and requires that Medicare and new health policies fully cover 45 preventive screenings and services.

Norton Healthcare's seminars meet Louisville's need for information and can lead to screenings and procedures that generate revenue, which is good business especially for those visiting Norton for the first time. According to a recent article in the Wall Street Journal, nearly 80% of adults between the ages of 20 to 80 are candidates for at least one preventive test or service.

One key way that Norton will publicize the event is on local NBC-affiliate "WAVE 3 Listens," a daily morning show that airs at 10 a.m. "Parts in Motion" is a regular feature of their Healthy Living segment, and the May 12th show will focus on the "Free Yourself from Arthritis Pain," seminar. "We find that there's a spike in calls and registrations right after that show," added Hart, theorizing that the show's target audience is compromised of many retirees.

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"Additionally, we emphasize our physicians' roles as orthopedic specialists, rather than as orthopedic surgeons," elaborated Hart about the subtle distinction in title.

"We tend to shy away from using the term 'surgeon' as it understandably scares some people," remarked Hart. "Yes, surgery may be a treatment for some conditions, but that's not always the case." Hart reports that many of these physicians are fellowship trained and specialize in specific areas of the body, such as arm and hand, or foot and ankle.

While some forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis are not preventable, they can be manageable. Some of arthritis' main symptoms (in rheumatoid and other forms of autoimmune arthritis) are pain and inflammation affecting joints, making them swell and turn red and tender. Diet, nutrition, controlling weight, exercise (such as stretching) and stress management are some of the ways to reduce or control these symptoms.

Osteoporosis can largely be prevented by optimizing bone health. "We want people to understand their risk factors, learn how to prevent the disease and then take action," says Amy Porter, Executive Director and CEO of NOF. "That means striving to get enough calcium, vitamin D and bone healthy exercise every day and talking to their doctors about when to get a bone density test."

Additionally, the National Osteoporosis Foundation's 5 Steps to Bone Health offers five, easy-to-follow steps to optimize bone health and help prevent osteoporosis:

- Get the calcium and vitamin D you need every day.
- Do regular weight-bearing and muscle-strengthening exercises.
- Don't smoke and don't drink too much alcohol
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your chance of getting osteoporosis, and ask when you should have a bone density test.
- Take an osteoporosis medicine when it's right for you.

"Osteoporosis now causes an estimated two million fractures each year and can result in immobility, pain, and other health problems," said Robert R. Recker, MD, NOF President. "These conditions and circumstances could largely be prevented through proper prevention, diagnosis and treatment." For more information, please visit the National Osteoporosis Foundation's website at: www.nof.org

For more information on the various forms of arthritis, such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, lupus, or fibromyalgia and their treatment, please visit www.arthritis.org.

*Mark Collins writes a monthly consumer e-newsletter for Nashville-based Community Health Systems. He also writes employee communications articles for Palomar Pomerado Health and has, over the years, contributed to national publications such as **USA Today**.*