



North Star News



MAY 2012

A Unique Opportunity for Seniors and Caregivers

CHC is working with researchers at the University of Pittsburgh to learn about the hospital experiences of older adults and their caregivers. CHC will be conducting focus groups with seniors age 60 and above who have had at least one hospitalization in the last 3 years; and adults who are a caregiver for an elderly person who has had a hospitalization in the last 3 years (caregiver must be 18 years of age or older to qualify to participate).

The focus group session which will last approximately 90 minutes and will focus on such questions as: Did the health care providers communicate effectively with you while the person for whom you offer care was in the hospital? Did you understand the diagnosis and any treatment recommendations that the providers made? How were you involved as a caregiver?



There are no foreseeable risks associated with this project, nor are there any direct benefits to you.. We **will provide food and beverages** at the meeting and each participant **will receive a payment of \$25.00** for their time and effort. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from this project at any time. This study is being conducted by the Rev. Sally Jo Snyder from the Consumer Health Coalition and Dr. Jeanette Trauth at the University of Pittsburgh.

If you would like to participate, **please call Leslie Bachurski at: [412-456-1877, extension 200](tel:412-456-1877) and leave your name and telephone number. Leslie will call you back to confirm that you meet the criteria and review the dates and times that are available.** The sessions will be at the CHC office during normal business hours over the next two months. Space is limited, so please RSVP early to ensure your spot.



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READ MORE about PA CBC at www.consumerhealthcoalition.org



Raising Health: How the Proposed Ryan Budget Will Affect Seniors

Special thanks to Jean Friday, President of the PA Alliance for Retired Americans, for sharing this information on our monthly Pennsylvania Campaign for Better Care Conference Call.

House Budget Committee Chairperson, Paul Ryan (R - WI), released the committee's 2013 federal budget proposal. The budget makes deep cuts to many programs and essentially changes Medicare as we know it today. Part of his plan is to replace Medicare with a voucher system. The vouchers would be used to pay for health care through a private insurance plan or through traditional Medicare starting in 2023. The value of the voucher would be capped at a rate determined by the GDP (the net worth the nation produces) + 0.5%. Since the voucher value is capped, any increases to the payment will be the responsibility of the Medicare beneficiary. This would allow the government to not take on Medicare cost debt and therefore pass it on to the consumer through more out-of-pocket costs. This can be upwards of \$1200 more per year by the year 2030.

This plan would also give private insurance providers the option to pick-up healthier beneficiaries. Medicare recipients would become the payer of the oldest and sickest beneficiaries; therefore, rising the cost of upkeep of the program. His plan would also raise the eligibility age for Medicare to age 67 over the next 12 years.

In addition, Ryan's plan will also repeal the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and leave aging Americans continuing to struggle to afford health insurance coverage. The thousands of people that are now benefitting from the ACA will have their benefits taken away and again be without access to coverage. His proposal also focuses on shifting the state's Medicaid system to a block grant that would severely impact long-term care and leave the burden of helping to pay for these costs on the states alone, many whom are facing serious budget shortfalls.

Advocacy Toolbox: Register to VOTE!

Your most important advocacy tool is your right to vote! The decisions that our politicians make affect YOU and YOUR FAMILY! Don't just sit back and let it happen! Get out and vote and help to get others registered! Here is what you need to do:

If you are 18 years of age, living in PA for the past 30 days prior to an election, and a citizen of the United States, then you are eligible to register in Pennsylvania.

- Visit www.votespa.com to download a blank application. This site also lists a link to your local county registration office and where your polling place is located.
- Remember, if you have moved since the last time that you voted, you need to re-register!
- Don't forget your photo ID the first time that you visit your polling place. Student IDs, Driver's License, Passport, Government, or an Employee ID are all acceptable forms of identification. **The deadline to register for the Presidential Election is October 8, 2012!**



Advocates Speak Out

At age 52, Dan had his right hip replaced due to bad arthritis. The operation left him with foot drop. After a short stay in a rehab hospital and time, he gradually regained a good percentage of motion in his foot. Seven years later in 2007, after the right hip replacement, he underwent a left hip replacement.

In March 2010, a routine follow-up visit started a year long ordeal that has taught him resilience and survival in our complex health care system. During this visit, Dan told his doctor about a small swelling, a slight discomfort in the left hip. His doctor felt the swelling through his jeans and told him that it was probably bursitis. Dan checked the internet and after a little research believed it could be bursitis. However, when the abscess quickly grew to the size of a softball, he returned to his doctor who admitted him to the hospital the following day for a surgical debridement (removal of the dead tissue).

Dan was hospitalized 2 additional times for surgical debridements and IV antibiotics. Home life became a maddening routine with the PICC line—a kind of tunneled IV line in the upper arm, oral antibiotics, wound care and working the wound vac, whose constant beeps and alarms seemed to baffle the home nurses. Writing in his notebook and charting progress on his illness preserved Dan's sanity and kept him focused on the day-to-day details of his treatment. His home nurses didn't seem to understand the operation of the wound vac and didn't feel that it was their responsibility. Dan eventually changed home nursing service to ease the wound vac and other problems. Doctors were debating on causes of infection and the treatment of the infected hip.

Four months later, the infectious disease specialist prescribed Zyvox, an expensive oral antibiotic. His orthopedic doctor advised continuing with an IV antibiotic, Vancomycin. Dan yielded to his infectious disease doctor and went with the Zyvox. He experienced some of the side effects, rashes, nausea and neuropathy. His feet and legs were getting numb after several months on this medication. The neuropathy still affects him.

At one point, he had difficulty walking, due to shortness of breath. He saw a cardiologist, who prescribed a Holter to monitor his cardiac system and a stress test. He was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. Now, Dan is on doxycycline, and it appears that his infection is under control. Perhaps one day, he could get off antibiotics.

As a result of Dan's hospital experience he realized how important it is to become a consumer health advocate. He actively participates in CHC's Healthy Hospitals work group that is focused on decreased hospital readmissions and developing consumer advocates. His advice to patients is "to take notes when they are seen in the outpatient or inpatient settings, to keep a notebook to write down dates, time, names of doctors, nurses, reasons, types of medication given, tests ordered, etc., and to have a friend or family member present at all times." When patients are at an appointment or in the hospital and don't feel well or when they are medicated, Dan suggests that doctors write down the explanation and plan of treatment so that patients could read or refer to them later. These seem like simple, common sense advice, but in the fast-paced, protocol-laden, priority-jumbled health care system, patients/consumers do need to take these basic steps to look after themselves. Dan hopes that this chapter of his life is coming to a close-- the hip infection, the antibiotics, the doctors, hospital, and testing!



CONSUMER HEALTH COALITION

415 E Ohio Street Suite 300
Pittsburgh, PA 15212

Phone: (412) 456-1877

Fax: (412) 456-1096

www.consumerhealthcoalition.org



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Consumer Health Coalition was founded in 1996. We are a non-profit health care advocacy organization with a mission to “inspire a consumer movement to advance health and enhance access to quality, affordable health care.”

We believe that access to quality, affordable health care, and ultimately good health and wellness, are critical to a person's ability to reach his or her potential. We also know that people experience disparate “starting points” or access to resources that are unfortunately correlated with socioeconomic status, racial or ethnic background, and disability status. CHC is dedicated to the eradication of disparities in health access and outcomes, and will continue pushing until every person has the health coverage and care they need.

Mark your calendar for these important dates!

MAY 2012

May 24, 2012

Seniors—Focus Group
11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Location:
CHC

May 29, 2012

Seniors—Focus Group
11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Location:
CHC

May 30, 2012

You had me at HELLO!
Free advocacy Training
2:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Location:
CHC

JUNE 2012

June 7, 2012

PA CBC Conference Call
What Happens after the Supreme Court Decision?
10:00 am to 11:00 am
Call-in: (712) 432-1630
Access code: 411307#

June 11, 2012

Caregivers—Focus Group
11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Location:
CHC

June 20, 2012

Caregivers—Focus Group
11:00 am to 2:00 pm
Location:
West Park Court—Northside