

Alaskan Seniors Living Longer Growing Stronger

from the Alaska Commission on Aging

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The mission of the Alaska Commission on Aging is to ensure dignity and independence for Alaska's seniors and to assist them, through programs and services funded by the Commission, to lead useful and meaningful lives.



Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger is a monthly publication of the Alaska Commission on Aging (ACoA)

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Nancy Jo Bleier leads a cross-section of participants—doctors, assisted living coordinators, counselors and seniors—in early morning Tai Chi Chih classes at the Ninth Annual Care of the Elderly Conference in Sitka.

Sitka Hosts Ninth Annual Care of the Elderly Conference

The Ninth Annual Care of the Elderly Conference: “Emerging Strategies for Function and Vitality” was held in Sitka September 21-22. The two-day conference focused on health care solutions for the whole person, helping us maintain good physical and mental health as we age.

Sponsors of the event included the Alaska Commission on Aging, Endo Pharmaceuticals, Inc., Purdue Pharma, L.P., Wyeth-Ayerst Laboratories, Division of Geriatric Medicine, Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center, Keck School of Medicine, Center for Community, and the Office of Continuing Education, University of Alaska Southeast, Sitka Campus.

The annual conference’s target audience is medical professionals, caregivers and the elderly. Although much of the conference focused on educating professional caregivers, several of the presentations offered information that many of us may find useful as we age. In this and future issues of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* we will share this with you.

Sandra Crandall on Avoiding the Seven Dreads of Aging: Weak, Leaky, Sexless, Wimpy, Wrinkled, Forgetful and Ugly

Sandra G. Crandall RN, CS, MSN, CRNP is the President and CEO of Health Concepts, Inc. in Pennsylvania. She was a keynote speaker at the Ninth Annual Care of the Elderly Conference held in Sitka in September (see page 1). Her presentation, *Avoiding the Seven Dreads of Aging*, outlined the most feared aspects of growing older, and how to avoid them or minimize their affects.

Ms. Crandall warns that we're getting too much information these days about the negative impacts of aging and other aspects of life. This information carries the underlying message of our society, that we all will eventually succumb to these negative impacts. She urges us to make the choice to be well. We can choose to avoid or minimize the affects of aging on our bodies, minds and spirits.

Ms. Crandall's presentation was directed primarily at women, but many of her recommendations apply to all of us as we age. Each dread was matched to an acronym that described treatment or prevention techniques. These acronyms are not included in this article except for one, the components of which were all self-image reminders. Some of her recommendations were directed specifically at her audience of medical professionals, with some medications sited individually for their impact and lack of side affects.

The Seven Dreads of Aging

Weak: According to Ms. Crandall, loss of strength is the greatest contributor to premature aging. By the time we reach the age of 80, we lose about 40% of our strength. Weakness from loss of strength, and/or from osteoporosis or heart disease, is, in Ms. Crandall's words, "absolutely avoidable."

Calcium is the key to fighting and preventing osteoporosis. Since calcium isn't made in the body, it must be consumed either through diet or dietary supplements. If not, our bodies must remove calcium from where it is stored within the body: our bones. If the calcium in our bones is depleted, we get osteoporosis.

Ms. Crandall urges us to get calcium daily through our diet or with supplements. For women, she recommends 1000 milligrams before menopause and 1500 milligrams after menopause. She also urged avoiding things that prevent absorption of calcium, such as carbonated drinks. Vitamin D is an important part of our diet, as it is needed to absorb calcium.

Because estrogen is key to avoiding osteoporosis, Ms. Crandall suggests avoiding smoking. Smoking prevents our bodies from absorbing and using estrogen properly. Smoking also leads to earlier menopause. Estrogen treatments may benefit some osteoporosis sufferers. Ask your doctor.

Avoiding smoking is also key to avoiding heart disease, as is keeping one's blood pressure low. New medical information indicates that our systolic pressure should be kept to 140 or lower. Anything higher than that could lead to heart disease.

Exercise is essential to avoiding muscle loss, osteoporosis and heart disease. Ms. Crandall suggests using elastic bands for progressive resistive exercise. She also said that flexibility and aerobic exercise is important. She recommends the Pilates (pronounced pi-LAT-is) program, an exercise regimen of stretching, strengthening, and breathing.

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Avoiding the Seven Dreads of Aging (continued from page 2)

Leaky: Incontinence can be a problem as we age, particularly for women. Again, Ms. Crandall says exercise is key to avoidance, particularly “Kegels.” Kegel exercises are simply squeezing the muscles in the affected area. She recommends at least 50 repetitions a day, not necessarily all at the same time. She advises it is never too early for women or men to start doing Kegels.

Estrogen can also help with incontinence. There are a variety of devices a doctor may be able to fit one with that can help in extreme cases. Ms. Crandall recommends avoiding obesity and foods and drinks that can have a diuretic affect, like caffeine and Nutrasweet brand artificial sweetener.

Sexless: As estrogen levels decrease, intimate relations may become painful, and sex drives can lower. Some medications, such as antidepressants, may also reduce libido. Ms. Crandall recommends Kegel exercises and lubricants. She suggests that doctors may prescribe estrogen and even testosterone in some cases.

Wimpy: Ms. Crandall uses this term to describe flagging interest in new experiences, learning new things, or making forward progress. She urges us to fight this tendency by exercising our minds and our bodies for optimal functioning. She urges us to seek out new challenges, try new things, and avoid ruts in our behavior.

Wrinkled: Although a certain amount of wrinkling is inevitable as we age, there are ways to reduce wrinkling. Drinking adequate amounts of liquids, quitting smoking, and avoiding the sun or using sunscreen can all help. Ms. Crandall points out that many skin moisturizers contain sunscreens. Estrogen can also help fight wrinkles, as it helps preserve collagen in the body.

Forgetful: This is perhaps the greatest dread of aging. Ms. Crandall assures us that some short-term memory loss will occur, and is normal. However, we need to beware of significantly impaired memory, which is not normal, and may indicate a new health problem, such as Alzheimer’s disease and related disorders. Memory loss may have a variety of causes. Medications, vitamin deficiencies, anemia, even urinary tract infections can all cause memory loss.

Ms. Crandall recommends exercise, healthy diet, sleep, and avoiding alcohol to keep our minds sharp. She warns that some medications such as sleeping pills can alter or muddle thinking.

Ugly: according to Ms. Crandall, this one is absolutely avoidable. As she says, “The older woman has never looked better!” She offers the following acronym to prevent becoming unattractive: IDEA. IDEA stands for

Inner peace yields outer beauty

Dress with a flair and color that enhances you

Exercise and eat healthy

Assess yourself. What do you want to do? Being excited about life creates its own beauty.

Ms. Crandall’s frank, often explicit presentation was well tempered by her good humor and enthusiasm for her subject.

Future issues of Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger will include reports on other presentations of the 9th Annual Care of the Elderly Conference.

Results of User Input on Newsletter Readability

In the last two issues of *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* we have asked readers to advise us on the readability of our printed issues. The question was whether or not we should increase our font size or type, which would allow for better readability, but would reduce content.

The majority of respondents felt that the current format is acceptable. However, those who requested larger type can't be ignored. While we will continue with our current fonts, there are many other printer's "tricks" that can be used to make this publication easier to read. We will make every effort to use these techniques whenever possible to ensure that reading the newsletter will be a comfortable and pleasant experience for everyone.

We always welcome your input, suggestions and criticisms. Please reach us through the contact information at the bottom of this page.

National Train-The-Trainer Workshop for Family Caregivers

The National Family Caregivers Association (NFCA), in conjunction with the National Alliance for Caregiving (NAC), is hosting a two-day caregiver training conference March 9-10, 2002 in Washington, DC. The event is designed to help family caregivers receive training on how to effectively communicate with health care professionals. The training is by invite only and participants must agree in advance to provide training for local caregivers following the sessions. Applications to attend are due by Oct. 31, 2001. Persons wishing to get more information and apply to attend should contact John Paul Marosy, Project Director, at 508-854-0431 or by email at jpmarosy@charter.net

Caregiving Newsletter and Caregiving.com Sponsor Caregiver of the Year Award

Caregiving newsletter and Caregiving.com are calling for nominations for the Seventh Annual Family Caregiver of the Year Award. *Caregiving* newsletter and Caregiving.com hold the annual award in order to recognize and honor the efforts of persons who care for an aging relative. An independent panel of judges chooses five winners. The winners and their stories are featured in the December issue of *Caregiving* newsletter and on Caregiving.com. Anyone caring for an aging relative, friend or neighbor is eligible for the award. Nominations are accepted annually from June 1 through October. Family caregivers can be nominated by other caregivers, health care professionals, family, friends, even themselves. More information is available on the web at www.caregiving.com or by calling 847-823-0639.

Senior Advocacy Coalition Holds Monthly Teleconferences

The Senior Advocacy Coalition meets by teleconference from 9:30 to 11:30 AM on the second Friday of every month to address issues affecting Alaska's seniors. The teleconference originates at the Anchorage Senior Center.

For more information on joining a meeting, contact Sue Samet, 261-4140, Lila Berry, 261-4848, or Brenda Brown, 338-6492 in Anchorage; Fred Lau 235-7355 in Homer; or Rosemary Hagevig 463-6153 in Juneau.



You can read *Alaskan Seniors: Living Longer, Growing Stronger* on line at www.AlaskaAging.org. To receive email notification when a new issue is on line, contact:

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