

Living Healthy: Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs Improving Lives Throughout Central Florida

Through its “Living Healthy” workshops, Florida Hospital’s Center for Health Futures is helping people who suffer from chronic diseases to lead healthier lives. This Chronic Disease Self-Management Program (CDSMP) boasts 1,689 “graduates” and is based on a proven model developed by the [Stanford University Patient Education Research Center](#) that is used worldwide to improve health and reduce hospitalizations. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Administration on Aging have adopted the CDSMP model as an effective, evidence-based program.

Created with the direct input of people who live with chronic diseases themselves, the workshops are currently offered at no cost to the participants and are small by design, with 10-16 attendees each. They enhance regular treatment and disease-specific education, and cover a number of subjects, including:

- Appropriate use of medications
- Nutrition
- Appropriate exercise to maintain and improve strength, flexibility and endurance
- Communicating effectively with family, friends and health professionals
- Techniques to deal with common problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain and isolation
- How to evaluate new treatments

The “Living Healthy” workshops are held at a number of community sites, including churches, senior centers and community centers, as well as at Florida Hospital Apopka and Florida Hospital East Orlando. Groups meet weekly for two and a half hours at a time over a six-week period. Each program is facilitated by two trained leaders, one or both of whom are non-health professionals who themselves have a chronic disease.

Filling a Gap

“These programs are based on a successful model, implemented in a consistent manner and fill a critical gap in our community,” said Lauren Josephs, program manager for health disparities research and education at the Center for Health Futures. “They are offered at no cost to the participants – the majority of whom are uninsured or underinsured and have limited access to this type of support.”

The workshops are available in both English and Spanish. The Spanish version is not simply a translation of the English one. It was developed separately, in Spanish, and is given entirely in Spanish. While the subjects covered are similar to the English version, they are presented in a manner that is culturally sensitive and appropriate.

Making a Measurable Impact

Under the guidance of the Center for Health Futures and with funding from the [Community Health Impact Council](#), two collaborative community health initiatives,

Cuidate (Spanish for “take care of yourself”) in East Orlando and Heart of Apopka have offered 187 “Living Healthy” workshops since 2007. Program participants have experienced significant improvements in self-reported general health, symptom management, exercise, communication with physicians, fatigue and disabilities. Overall, they have spent fewer days in the hospital and visited emergency departments less often, resulting in a cost savings of about \$1,500 per participant. Many have also referred others to the program.

In addition to overseeing the workshops, the Center for Health Futures has also become one of just a few organizations in the country to develop all three levels of trainers:

- Leaders -- facilitate workshops
- Master Trainers -- train Leaders and facilitate workshops
- T-Trainers -- train Master Trainers and Leaders as well as facilitate workshops

Looking Ahead

Looking to the future, the Center for Health Futures hopes to continue to grow the “Living Healthy” program and expand its reach in the Central Florida community. The program’s strength has already been recognized by both the CDC and the Florida Department of Health.

“So many people, especially seniors, live with chronic conditions and struggle to manage their illnesses,” said Josephs. “And unlike a common cold or a broken leg that heals in a short time, chronic illnesses typically last for a lifetime. If we can teach people to be active managers of their health, we can really improve their quality of life.”

In addition to the “Living Healthy” workshops, the Center for Health Futures plans to someday offer a separate diabetes self-management program, also developed and tested by Stanford, and focused specifically on the unique needs and challenges of living with type 2 diabetes.

For more information about “Living Healthy,” contact Lauren Josephs at lauren.josephs@flhosp.org or 407-646-7011.