

Podcast Transcript: Celebrate Older Americans Month

Barry: Welcome to Senior Care Corner. I'm Barry.

Kathy: And I'm Kathy. Thanks for joining us!

Barry: As always, you'll find us online at SeniorCareCorner.com with solutions, tools and information for families, caregivers and others who care for and about senior adults.

Well this is Older American's Month, and we're going to be talking about seniors in general and Older American's Month in particular in our feature segment today, so, really looking forward to that. But before we get there, Kathy I suppose you've got some news items for us?

Kathy: I do as always. Our first news item today is: **Too Many Pills for Aging Patients**

Over medication in the elderly is a far too common problem, a public health crisis that compromises the well-being of older adults according to this article published in the New York Times.

The article reports a series of research based guidelines were recently updated and published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society that outlines a number of medications most likely to cause adverse reactions in the elderly.

More than 40% of adults over age 65 take five or more medications and one third of these will experience an adverse side effect which can result in serious health outcomes.

Experts have updated the Beers Criteria which highlights 53 potentially inappropriate medications or classes of medication and categorized them into three different groups.

Group 1-drugs to avoid in general in the elderly

Group 2-drugs to avoid in older people with certain diseases

Group 3-drugs to use with caution in the elderly if there are no acceptable alternatives

The Beers Criteria should be used by physicians and patients within and outside of institutional settings. They warn that a doctor's clinical judgment or a patient's needs themselves should be the first consideration and this criteria should not be used as grounds for a malpractice dispute.

The Geriatrics Society's Foundation for Health in Aging has created a Drug Diary that lists your senior's medications and dosages. They recommend this diary should be completed and kept current. It should be taken with you to every doctor and health care provider visit for review to prevent duplication or interaction. We will have a link to this form in today's show notes.

Don't forget to ask your health care provider about any side effects when being given any new prescription. Let your doctor know immediately if there are any reactions or the drug does not seem to be working, don't stop taking the medication without talking with your doctor. Let your doctor know of any supplements or over the counter medications you take so that he can be sure

there are no harmful interactions with the prescription drugs. Even something as innocent as ibuprofen or antihistamine can cause problems.

Barry: Interesting the trade-offs that highlights, certainly we want doctors to be responsible for the health of their patients, however when you look at it, not all doctors are equal. I mean, certainly there ought to be some guidelines there to provide some guidance to those who might need a little bit of help.

Kathy: Well this Beer Criteria is specially designed for physicians that aren't used to taking care of seniors. It'll help guide them along in the process.

Alright, our news story number 2: **Could Fat Be Your Friend over Age 85?**

Most people already know that excess weight can impact health and take years off your life.

A new research study has shown that having a few extra pounds when you are in your mid-80s may actually help you live longer.

It seems that being a very old age has different rules. The protective effects of obesity become more pronounced in this age group.

A few differences include:

-heavier people have lower rates of the bone thinning disease osteoporosis; this could impact the rate of falls and injuries to their skeleton

-obesity may also provide energy reserves during stress such as illness and trauma.

Researchers warn that this does not mean that seniors should fatten up if they aren't currently overweight.

This study only investigated mortality and not well-being in this age group.

Other scientists warn that there remain far too many unanswered questions about longevity and weight. They state that if a person has made it to their mid-80s, there are many factors that contributed to achieving that age which may be unrelated to weight.

Barry: Well, it's not like we don't need some more mixed signals from the health community, isn't it?

Kathy: Right. Alright, news story number 3: **Dementia Cases Expected to Triple as World Population Ages**

Due to strides in healthcare globally, the world's population continues to grow.

This will lead to an expected number of cases of dementia in this aging population of 35.6 million today tripled by the year 2050.

Dr. Shekhar Saxena, the head of the World Health Organization's mental health division recently reported that "the better we do, the more we expect to have problems with dementia and we need to be prepared for that".

This increase in dementia sufferers will put a strain on the world's public health systems. Only eight countries have national programs to address dementia. The

United States is NOT among them.

Dementia degrades memory with a decline in everyday skills which often puts a heavy burden on family caregivers.

Even though millions of people around the world live with dementia, it is often diagnosed late or not at all. Only 20 to 50 percent of cases are routinely recognized. And a stigma will often keep people from getting diagnosed or treated.

The graying of the globe with people over age 60 will rise from 10% currently to 20% of the population in the next four decades.

Barry: Well we've got to adapt the entire world as the population continues to grow older.

Kathy: True. Alright, our final news item today: **Shingles Vaccine Safe, Underutilized Study Says**

A new study states that the shingles vaccine is generally safe and well tolerated by patients.

Shingles affects more than 1 million people each year in the United States. It is a painful rash which is contagious and caused by the dormant chickenpox virus and can result in damage to the nervous system.

Seniors are at a greater risk for contracting the virus since immunity to the chicken pox virus decreases with age.

Researchers reviewed data from more than 193,000 adults over 50 years who received the shingles vaccine. There was a small risk of local reaction such as redness and pain for up to one week after the injection.

The vaccine did not increase risk for other diseases such as cardiovascular disease, meningitis, Bell's palsy, encephalopathy or encephalitis according to these researchers.

The Centers for Disease Control recommend the shingles vaccine for all adults over 60 years.

Barry: That's interesting I guess we've all also seen that commercial on TV talking about Shingles with the gentleman talking about how painful it was. So, I guess that's all coming together and it's all helpful education.

Kathy: It certainly is and many seniors are not taking advantage of this vaccine but they are more at risk because if they had chicken pox as a young child their immunity to it is gone.

Barry: Just another way we've got to change the way we think as we grow older.

Thanks Kathy, some great news items, as always. We'll move into our feature segment now, it should be no surprise that Senior Care Corner takes particular interest and notice of Older Americans Month.

Older Americans Month has been celebrated in the United States each May since 1963. The intent of this honor of Older Americans is to acknowledge the many contributions of older adults and what they have achieved, as well as to show our appreciation for what they have meant to our nation and to our local communities.

Interestingly, the theme selected for Older Americans Month 2012 focuses back on *their* needs as they age more so than what they have done. And in fact it's something that goes back to a lot of the things that we talk about here at Senior Care Corner. The theme they've selected, Never Too Old to Play is intended as encouragement to older Americans to stay active and to be engaged and involved, not only in their own lives but in the communities in which they live.

To facilitate local activities, the US Administration on Aging developed a site on the web for those interested in planning and promoting events. The website, for which we'll provide a link in the show notes, provides resources that can be used and a suggestion that the activities involve multiple generations. That last suggestion is a great idea, promoting interaction and communication among the generations, will benefit all of us. Seniors have so much to offer those in younger generations in exchange for interaction, communication and really when it comes right down to it, simply caring about them.

A little bit more on Older Americans though:

As part of Senior Care Corner's celebration of Older Americans Month we feel it is important to understand some basic information about them. For our look, we'll define "older" as referring to seniors, those 65 and older. First let's take a look at the numbers of seniors in the United States, based on data published by the Census Bureau from the 2010 Census.

Now, there were more than 40 million seniors in 2010, according to the Census, and they comprised 13% of the total population of the United States. That 40 million is up 15% from the count 10 years while the overall US population increased less than 10%, confirming what we have been discussing in the past about the population getting older. Not just the past of course but also some of the articles that Kathy discussed.

Kathy: Well, also not surprising is that there are more senior women than men, though the magnitude of the difference is something we did not expect. 57% of seniors are women, who outnumber senior men by more than 5 million. In fact, if you take seniors out of the Census count you find that males make up slightly over half of the rest of the population. As you look at the most elderly age groups you find even greater domination by women. For example, the Census Bureau reports 44,000 women 100 years of age and older but only 9,000 men. Men appear to be closing the gap, however, with a higher percentage of growth in each of the senior age categories.

In future discussions we'll have to explore what this population difference might mean to the care needed and the way we approach our senior loved ones overall.

Barry: Excellent point there Kathy; and really some interesting statistics there.

Where do seniors live, at least geographically? Well, as with the rest of the population, the greatest number of seniors live in the South, followed by the West. While the fewest number of seniors live in the Northeast region, they comprise 14% of the total population there, the highest

composition of any region. While the senior population in the West is growing faster, at 23%, than in any other region, seniors still comprise the smallest portion of the population in the West, at just under 12%. They are much higher percentage in the other regions.

Now, one remarkable statistic jumped out at us from the geographic data. While the number of seniors 85 and older grew by just under 30% for the United States as a whole from 2000 to 2010, the West saw a staggering 43% growth in that age group, just a tremendous number. I suspect we will see some discussions of what drove that and what it means for the future. Not just for the West but for the entire nation.

Kathy: That is an interesting shift to the West.

Well, shifting gears a bit, where do seniors live, at least in terms of living arrangements? Would you be surprised to hear that only 3.1%, less than 1.3 million lived in skilled nursing facilities? Many people think that percentage is higher. That number IS higher for older seniors, with a third of those 100 years old or older in skilled nursing facilities.

Barry: Interestingly, though maybe not to you, Kathy, based on your experience, senior women are almost twice as likely as senior men to be living in a nursing home.

Kathy: That's true. The overwhelming majority of seniors, almost 39 million, were reported as living in what the Census defined as households. Just about a quarter of those, or under 10 million, are seniors living alone in their household. We know a lot of seniors live alone but putting this big number on it is really striking and points out the challenge that exists for family caregivers and the communities themselves, in which seniors live.

Barry: Well Kathy, another 15 million seniors were considered the "householder" by the Census. Our best reading of that this is more or less means head of household but can cover more than that. Along with those seniors living alone, that means about 2/3 of seniors are heads of their household. Another quarter of the senior populations are spouses of the householder.

Kathy: Well, one statistic not surprising to us is the report of more than 2 million seniors who are the parents or parents in law of the head of household. That means almost 6% of seniors live in the home of their children.

One statistic that we think will grow over time and points to caregiving challenges for the rest of the family are the 75,000 plus seniors who live in a household in which their parent is the head of household. Yes THEIR parents are the head of their household as a senior.

One WOW statistic is the 26 seniors who are reported to be living in a household headed by one of their grandparents. I wonder if we will see more of that as time goes by and the number of seniors in the most elderly categories continues to grow.

Barry: That is a WOW statistic Kathy! Gotta wonder about that, but then again, I guess before somebody put that into a report, I'm sure it was checked and double checked and probably checked a few more times because of the nature of the number and the fact that it is such a tiny amount with so many big numbers in the Census.

Kathy: A tiny number but a staggering number.

Barry: Now we certainly look forward to seeing more detail come from the 2010 census so we can dive into that data even further. We'll pass along anything we find of interest there in the future.

Hopefully those developing and marketing technology will note what the Census has to say about the growth in the senior population, especially in the oldest age categories, and they'll realize is that there really is a market for devices that help improve the lives of these seniors. We've talked about it again and again. Now of particular note should be the quarter of seniors who live alone, as that is one indication of a growing value for products aiding family caregivers especially those who don't live in the same home as their senior loved ones. I mean, that's gotta be a tremendous market there for companies.

Kathy: While we're talking about seniors and numbers, Barry, I think we should discuss another report that we saw this week. The Meals on Wheels Research Foundation released their annual report on senior hunger in America, which also looked at 2010 information. Certainly if we are talking about Older Americans Month and thanking them for what they have done for our nation, we would be remiss if we overlook the hunger problem many of these same older adults are experiencing.

Barry: Excellent point, Kathy let's go ahead and take a look at those numbers. We'll put a link to the report in our show notes for those who want to read a little more and we hope that some of you will do that. For those who DO follow up and read the study, they cover adults 60 years old and older as seniors. Just to be consistent with the Census data we've discussed and really the way we generally consider seniors, otherwise we're gonna break out those 65 and older where they provide a basis for doing so in the report's statistics. So if you go ahead and try to match things up, you've got to dig a little bit more so you can get to what we're talking about.

But, the Meals on Wheels report say that 13.6% of seniors in the United States were facing the threat of hunger in 2010. By "threat of hunger" they mean the seniors answered affirmatively to 1 or more questions in a survey called the Core Food Security Module. These questions cover topics related to the availability of food, the ability to eat a balanced diet, skipping meals and other generally accepted indicators of hunger.

At greatest risk were the younger seniors, though each of the senior age groups reported 10% under threat of hunger. Just numbers that are too big for any age group, but certainly for the seniors who have done so much for us over their lives.

The percentage of seniors facing the threat of hunger has increased significantly over the last 10 years. Real progress had been made in reducing the numbers from 2004 through 2006 but the deep recession we experienced drove the numbers up significantly by 2008, which was the peak period for the hunger statistics among seniors. Of course, direct financial impacts on seniors from the recession plus recession-driven cuts in funds available for government meals programs certainly combined to deepen food insecurity for seniors. Hopefully we'll see some improvement in that as the economy improves again.

Kathy: We hope so! And let's not forget what we've talked about in the past Barry and that is some seniors out there are actually having to make a choice between buying prescription drugs and buying food. And that's kind of tough.

Given the ties between nutrition and our senior loved ones' health and ability to be active, the hunger issue points to further problems we may see down the road if action isn't taken.

Barry: I certainly won't argue with that, Kathy. Thank you for bringing the issue to the forefront. Again, for those wanting to learn more about the study, we have included a link in the show notes.

Now that we understand more about older Americans, we turn to the Older Americans Month celebration itself. Now Kathy, what are they suggesting we do?

Kathy: One important thing we should do is simply promote Older Americans Month as we are here. Raising awareness of the celebration reminds people of the achievements of seniors and what they have and do mean to our nation. The Administration on Aging offers messages and stories that can be shared, especially on social media. There is even a hash tag they established to use in sharing information on Twitter, which we will use. In fact, some of you listening to this episode may have found us because we promoted this episode using that hash tag.

Barry: And a special welcome to those of you who found us that way; we hope you'll come back often and look at the other things that we have to offer beyond this podcast episode.

Kathy: There are also available more traditional posters and newsletters that can be used to promote the celebration and encourage participation by others.

Barry: Maybe the best way to get involved is to set up and host a day of play in your community to involve not just older Americans but people of all ages. Several types of activities are suggested on the website.

Activities in which participants get physical are great for those of all ages, encouraging physical fitness. Being active improves health and quality of life at all ages but is especially important for those who are older.

Kathy: Activities that stimulate the brain are a great habit to start for those of all ages but especially beneficial for older adults. As we've discussed before at Senior Care Corner, studies indicate that these activities may even be able to reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other types of dementia.

Barry: Activities of all types that bring together people of all ages can provide benefits to all, not just the older adults but younger adults and even children. There is SO much we can learn from being with each other.

Kathy: Well activities that bring out individual or group creativity can be a powerful way to engage seniors, spurring their self-expression. When done with participants of various ages this can be a great way for younger people to learn from their elders.

Barry: Yes, there are so many ways to play that come to mind – surely you are already thinking about many yourselves. It doesn't have to be something that's organized the way they talk about on the website though, a way to play could be merely stop into a local nursing home and playing a board game with a few of the residents. That might even become a habit you enjoy year round, great for you as well as for them.

Like many of the other commemorations we have in America, Older Americans Month is not just a celebration but should also be a reminder of things we could be doing year round. Yes, a special activity set up as part of the Month is great for seniors, but having activities - - and having FUN - - year round is much more beneficial to their lives... and really when it comes down to it, a much better way of recognizing what they mean to us.

Kathy: I agree.

Barry: We hope you'll learn more about Older Americans Month, but not only that, DO something about it. Even if it means going to a family member or some other senior and getting involved with their lives. You can really make a difference.

Kathy: Have fun with them today! Go out and play!

Barry: Thanks Kathy, that's a good point. Well, that's it for our feature segment; I don't suppose you have a quick tip for us today?

Kathy: Well of course I do! Our quick tip today is:

Spot the Symptoms of GERD

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a condition that occurs when the muscle at the base of your esophagus allows fluids and food from your stomach to rise up into the esophagus. And it can be very painful. Unfortunately it affects many of our seniors.

The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse lists these symptoms of GERD:

- A burning sensation, known as heartburn, in the chest or upper abdominal.
- A frequent dry cough.
- Symptoms of asthma.
- Difficulty swallowing.
- Tasting food or fluid from the stomach at the back of the mouth, often known as acid reflux.
- Acid reflux that occurs more than twice a week.

You will want to talk to your doctor about this, make sure you get it checked out and treated today!

Barry: Well very good, thank you Kathy. And that's it for our episode today folks. I want to give you a little assignment before we go here, we'd like to hear from you about the activities in which you participated in as a part of Older Americans Month; whether it's promoting the month or actually getting out and doing an activity with seniors, whether it's senior loved ones or others. We'd like you to stop by SeniorCareCorner.com and leave a comment on this post or stop by our Facebook page at Senior Care Corner. Tell us what you've done; share it with us and the rest of the community. And we'll make sure that it's noted.

We'd love to hear from you whether it's that activity or other comments or suggestions, we hope you'll stop by and say hi! Until next time, thank you for joining us and we hope you have a great day!