

Living Healthy With Chronic Pain: A Self-Management Program Coming to Polk County

Jane Armstrong, MSW

Jane Armstrong, MSW is the Evidence Based Coordinator at Region C Area Agency on Aging and an active member of the Polk, Fresh and Friendly community. She has a long history of teaching, training and program development in a variety of academic and agency settings.

Back pain? Neck pain? Headache or migraine? Pain from fibromyalgia or arthritis? Lingered pain from an injury? According to the American Academy of Pain Medicine, at least 100 million adult Americans have chronic pain conditions. In addition, the National Institute of Health states chronic pain affects more Americans than diabetes, heart disease and cancer combined, and names pain the leading cause of disability in the United States.

How many of us in Polk County have heard a family member or friend relate his or her pain stories from a chronic condition, recent back, hip, knee injury, arthritis or cancer? What can be done? First and foremost, individuals suffering from chronic pain must collaborate with physicians to develop a treatment plan to help manage the pain. In the process, it is important to be able to assess what is currently being done and set new goals toward a healthier lifestyle.

You may have heard and/or participated in either Living Healthy with a Chronic Illness or Living Healthy with Diabetes classes already being offered right here in Polk County. Recently, Region – C, Area Agency on Aging announced the expansion of another Living Healthy program for this region – Living Healthy with Chronic Pain. The Living Healthy programs are designed to enhance regular treatment plans by providing participants with the skills needed to coordinate all of the things involved in managing their health while dealing with chronic pain.

Living Healthy with Chronic Pain is modeled after the two programs previously mentioned. The workshop consists of 6 weekly two-and-one-half hour meetings. The workshop is facilitated by two trained leaders, one or both of whom are peers who are themselves dealing with chronic pain. Subjects covered include: 1) techniques to deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, isolation, and poor sleep 2) appropriate exercise for maintaining and improving strength, flexibility, and endurance, 3) appropriate use of medications, 4) communicating effectively with family, friends, and health professionals, 5) nutrition, 6) pacing activity and rest, and, 7) how to evaluate new treatments.

The first Chronic Pain Self-Management 6 week workshop will be offered in Polk County March 16, 23, 30, and April 6, 13, 20, 2016, 9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m., at The Meeting Place, 75 Carmel Lane, Columbus, NC. To register for the workshop, call Cooperative Extension (828) 894-8218, by March 14.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer Lay Leader in any of the 3 Living Healthy programs, contact Jane Armstrong, jarmstrong@regionc.org. While Region C Area Agency on Aging is the original and primary sponsor of the program in the four county area it serves, in Polk County these programs are strongly supported by Polk County Cooperative Extension and St. Luke's Hospital. We would like to also acknowledge Rutherford Polk McDowell Health District for supplying 100 copies of the books needed by participants in these programs. Collaboration, communication and cooperation are the cornerstones of efforts to make Polk County a healthier place to live!

Polk Fit, Fresh and Friendly (PF3) is a group of 80+ community members, leaders and health professionals, all working together to plan and implement effective strategies to promote wellness in our community. We welcome any individual who is interested in joining us to make our community a healthier place for all. For more information and a list of our 2016 meeting dates, please visit our website at www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org.