

Communications Are Crucial When Diagnosis Is Grim

"Life is what happens to you when you are making other plans."

Many couples face devastating news when doctors have diagnosed a partner with a serious illness or disease that has life-threatening consequences. Part of successful coping is to go through it together.

Why is it so important for an ill person to talk about their emotions?

Talking is a form of coping. Deep communication is a buffer to stress. By talking to your spouse, you try to make sense of what is happening. You try to deal with all the changes an illness brings. You need a sounding board in these circumstances. As you talk, you formulate your own plans for coping with the situation.

By being willing to talk, you invite others to share their love and concern with you. Being soothed, comforted and cared for in a time of crisis softens the impact of the trauma.

What are some of the life changes couples need to work through? There is certainly plenty to talk about. For instance, here are some issues that come to mind:

- Restrictions on outside activities, recreation
- Changes in gender role responsibilities
- Financial pressure
- Compliance with rehabilitation or medications
- Adjustments in sexual interest and performance
- Increased social isolation
- Adjustments to plans, goals and dreams
- Physical and psychological adjustments for specific limitations of the disease
- Acceptance of loss
- Impact on adult children and grandchildren

Is there a medical reason for talking through your problems? Negative emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, anxiety and frustration need to be expressed. Researchers have found that failure to talk stifles emotions and creates even more worries, intrusive thoughts and unexpressed anger. With time, the inner emotional turmoil undermines the immune system. With heart patients, people who clam up have twice the coronary reactivity.

Autonomic activity improves when emotions are expressed. This is true when thoughts and emotions are written out as well. Besides being a tool in solving important problems, personal expression of emotion by itself reduces stress.

What if one partner wants to talk and the other doesn't? It is easy to forget in these circumstances that the patient's spouse is also hurting and dealing with emotional pain. By clamping up, the patient denies an opportunity for his or her spouse to talk through his or her feelings and make sense of how things must change. The spouse of an ill person is

going through change and crisis in his or her own life as well. By not dealing with the illness, one partner effectively shuts down and shuts out the other. When a spouse is reluctant to be open about a health crisis, the patient is faced with sacrificing his or her own morale in order not to place an excessive burden on a loved one.

Either way, going through a crisis alone creates loneliness and isolation.

What happens if you weren't getting along before this happened? Hostility in a relationship adds to health risks. Hostile criticism predicts a relapse of heart problems, higher blood pressure and elevated heart rates. The way a couple handles conflict and the amount of negative interactions in their relationship contributes to poorer health.

By hostile or negative interactions, I mean criticism, sharp disagreements, denial of responsibility, interruptions, negative mind-reading, put downs, sarcasm, disapproval, blaming and anger. Marriage is also affected by not tracking what is being said, withdrawal, getting off topic and emotional disengagement.

A health crisis highlights preexisting weaknesses and problems in marriage. It is the quality of the marriage that determines how supportive the couple will be for each other when a major crisis hits. When the time of crisis arrives, the time for preparation is past.

Handling a non-compliant partner. Suppose your affected partner doesn't keep on their diet, exercise, or medications and is continuing some risky behavior? Following medical instructions is the smart thing to do and it benefits the marriage as well.

By not being compliant, worry, strain and anger are added to the relationship. One spouse becomes over-anxious and insistent while the other fights to retain his or her autonomy.

Is there a silver lining? This can be one of the best times in your life together. You share deep emotion at the most intimate of levels. In meeting the challenge of adversity, you are forced into open and heartfelt communication.

As a couple, you support each other. You draw closer together. Your love and appreciation for one another deepens. Devotion is obvious. No matter what happens with the illness, you will remember how special you were with each other.

For more information on coping with illness, visit Val Farmer's website at www.valfarmer.com.

Val Farmer is a clinical psychologist specializing in family business consultation and mediation with farm families. He lives in Wildwood, Missouri and can be contacted through his website.

This column is sponsored by Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health



Val FARMER

VISITING HOURS

Healthy Feet Fundamental To Life

BY TERENCE PEDERSEN, DPM
Avera Foot & Ankle Clinic

For many of us, our feet are the furthest things from our minds, both physically and mentally. We expect they'll be uncomfortable at times, and we put up with it when they hurt. But healthy feet are fundamental to the quality of our lives.

Feet are wondrously engineered and often the indicators of our overall health, so we need to look after them. Signs of arthritis, diabetes, nerve and circulatory disorders can all be detected in our feet. For these reasons and many more, we must ensure that our feet get the expert care they need and deserve at all stages in our lives.

Podiatrists are physicians, surgeons and specialists who are highly trained to diagnose and treat conditions affecting the foot, ankle and related structures of the leg. Podiatrists complete years of rigorous foot and ankle training in podiatric medical school and hospital-based residency training, making them uniquely qualified to care for this part of the body. Podiatrists should be an important part of your health care team.

Podiatrists can specialize in:

- Surgery
- Wound care
- Biomechanics
- Sports medicine
- Geriatrics
- Pediatrics
- Diabetic care
- Dermatology



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Because feet are complex anatomical structures, all-in-one stabilizers, shock absorbers and propulsion engines that are instrumental to overall health and wellbeing, seventy-five percent of Americans will experience foot health problems at some point in their lives.

You should visit a podiatrist if you have:

- Foot pain of any kind
- Diabetes
- Foot and lower-leg irregularities (including flat feet, bow legs)
- Recent or recurring foot, ankle, or lower-leg injuries
- Sores or infections
- Circulation problems

For more information on foot and ankle services, please contact the Avera Foot & Ankle Clinic at (605) 668-8601.

This weekly column is produced by the public relations office at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital to promote healthy lifestyles and provide useful medical information to our community.

DHHS Distributes Dental Supplies To 6,600 Children

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Oral Health (OOH) has announced an ambitious new program to deliver vital dental supplies to 6,600 children across Nebraska.

The program, entitled Take Home Toothbrush, promotes good oral health practices to children enrolled in the 195 Head Start and Early Head Start programs from the classroom to their homes. The goal is to reduce the prevalence of dental cavities and other oral problems in low-income youth by sending home toothbrushes and toothpaste quarterly to Head Start enrollees.

"This program will create a foundation for good oral health in the future, a cornerstone of overall health," said Dr. Joann Schaefer, the state's Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. "By putting the tools in the hands of Nebraska's children, we hope to prevent future problems, such as severe tooth decay."

The program hopes to remedy the severe disparities in oral health services by working to overcome the effects of uneven distribution of dentists across Nebraska. Presently, 53 of Nebraska's 93 counties have either inadequate or non-existent access to dental care. According to a report of the Nebraska Dental Workforce Committee, the two most populated counties in Nebraska, Douglas and Lancaster, account for 56 percent of the dental workforce, creating per capita values much higher than the rest of the state. The Nebraska Governor's Rural Health Advisory Commission has designated 53 counties in the state as Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas. As of April 2008, 20

counties reported having no dentist, and an additional 32 counties have only one or two dentists.

"Every child at Head Start brushes their teeth at least once a day during school hours and we are impressed with Head Start's dedication to improving the oral health of young children. We want to be sure that the children have sufficient supplies at home so that every child can continue brushing their teeth at home," said Dr. Kären Sorenson, Dental Director for the Office of Oral Health.

"Head Start has always recognized the importance that a healthy mouth has — a child with severe dental disease is not ready to learn. They can't concentrate or focus if they have pain in their mouth," she said.

DHHS received a three-year grant in 2009 of \$1.5 million from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to find ways to improve dental care for children under eight, including the Take Home Toothbrush program.

Since 1949, the DHHS Office of Oral Health has sought to improve the lives of Nebraskans by promoting preventative oral care, particularly in young children. The Head Start program is a federal program started in 1964 that provides grants to local public and private non-profit and for-profit agencies to provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families.

For more information, contact the Office of Oral Health at 402-471-0166 or DHHS.OralHealth@nebraska.gov.

SCHOLASTICS

UNIVERSITY OF MARY ANNOUNCES SPRING GRADUATES

Bismarck, ND — On Saturday, April 30, the University of Mary, America's Leadership University, will recognize 990 graduates with a total of 1,001 degrees, at its 2011 commencement. The ceremony will begin at 1:30 pm, in the Bismarck Civic Center. This will be the largest graduating class in the university's history and the first time that the number of degrees awarded in a given year has reached the 1,000 mark.

From the area is: Jared Ashley Master of Business Administration, Mission Hill.

KELLY RECEIVES TALENT GRANT AND SCHOLARSHIP FROM MSU-MANKATO

MANKATO, Minn. — Timothy (Ty) Kelly has been named recipient of a \$1,000 Music Talent Grant and a \$1,000 Maverick Scholarship Award from Minnesota State University, Mankato for the 2011-2012 academic school year. Music Talent Grants are awarded by

the Department of Music to incoming freshmen in the performance areas of voice, keyboard, strings, percussion and wind instruments. The Maverick Scholarship is awarded to students who demonstrate outstanding academic achievement.

Minnesota State Mankato is committed to providing encouragement and opportunities for those students planning to continue their education.

Timothy is the son of Tim and Claris Kelly of Yankton.

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*Contest ends June 3, 2011. Customer must maintain account for at least 6 months to be eligible. Random drawing to be held November 2011. Active account required at time of drawing. This promotion is open to all active customers, but excludes employees and their immediate families.

NorthWestern Energy
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Arbor Day Festivities Planned At Morgan Park

The public is invited to the Arbor Day festivities and the celebration of Yankton's 28th year as a Tree City USA. The festivities will be held at Morgan Park, located at the corner of 11th Street and Green Street, at 1:30 p.m. Friday, April 29.

The celebration will include participation by Lincoln Elementary School, Keep Yankton Beautiful, the mayor, and the Yankton Urban Forestry division.

For more information, contact the Department of Parks and Recreation Office at 668-5231.

2 Room

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Tickets are \$30 or 2 for \$50.

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