

Amazing Aging!

For Seniors and Those Who Love Them

**A free publication of the Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, Inc.
Advocacy, Action and Answers on Aging for Shawnee, Jefferson and Douglas Counties**

SPRING 2022



Our Mission

Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, Inc. advocates on aging issues, builds community partnerships and implements programs within Shawnee, Jefferson, and Douglas counties to help seniors live independent and dignified lives.

- Is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization
- Is funded by tax-deductible contributions, federal funds, under state general funds and funds through local governments
- Does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, religion, or disability



Sharon Wright accepts the position of Fiscal Manager for Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging (story on page 3).

A Message from Susan Harris, JAAA Executive Director

Every spring Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging goes through a process known as allocations where a team of individuals determine what services and provider agencies will receive Federal Older Americans Act funding to provide services to those age 60 and older and their caregivers. This year, as with many years, it is a difficult process determining what services will be funded with the limited funds received each year.

The committee meets with providers to discuss what is going well, what needs to improve, and what the future holds for these providers and services. With the increase in the number of people age 60

and older residing in our service area and the growth of funding not following suit, the Allocations Committee members have a tough job of making sure that services and funding are targeted to specific needs that will benefit the communities we serve.

Older Americans Act services are not means tested in any way and they are provided on a donation basis, with that being said, donations are vital to the programs funded by the OAA. The donations received are returned back to the specific service as program income allowing for more services to be provided, the more donations received, the more services that



Susan Harris

can be provided. The allocation dollar and service amounts determined by the Allocations Committee are submitted to Jayhawk Advisory Committee for review and recommendation to approve and then presented to the JAAA Board of Directors for approval and incorporation into the annual area plan.

Each May, the Administration for Community Living leads the celebration of Older Americans Month (OAM). This year's theme is *Age My Way*,

focusing on aging in place — how older adults can plan to stay in their homes and live independently in their communities for as long a possible. This is an opportunity for all of us to explore the many ways older adults can remain in and be involved with their communities. Planning, participation, accessibility, and making connections all play a role in aging in place — emphasizing that what each person needs and prefers is unique.

Consider being a Senior Volunteer

You will not only help others, you will help yourself as well. Volunteering prevents isolation and gets seniors out into the community with people who recognize your abilities and count on you to help. Volunteering helps you learn new skills and interact with people of all ages. Perhaps best of all, the regular routine of volunteering will keep you active, energize you and may even help you live a longer and happier life. That is a win-win!

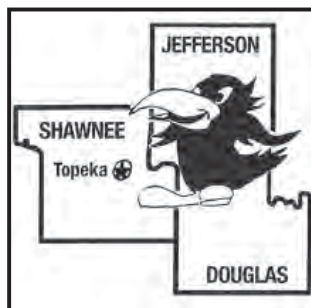
Amazing Aging strives to provide readers with the information they need to live independent and productive lives. We also seek to feature stories of seniors who are active as workers, volunteers or engaged in hobbies. If you know a senior you would like to see featured in a future issue, please contact editor Marsha Henry Goff at mhgink@netscape.net or write to her in care of JAAA, 2910 SW Topeka Boulevard, Topeka, KS 66611.

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Marsha Henry Goff, editor



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Meet Sharon Wright, JAAA's new Fiscal Manager

By Marsha Henry Goff

Accepting the position of Fiscal Manager for Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging was not an easy decision for Sharon Wright. While she was clearly qualified for the job through her education and work experience with finances at JAAA, she loved the work she was doing as Administrative Manager.

Almost everyone expected that when long-time Fiscal Manager Jean Stueve retired, Sharon would take her place, but she twice turned down the opportunity. Three individuals were hired to become Fiscal Manager and none of the three made it through training. "Then, after we had three who didn't work out," Sharon says, "I kept thinking, 'How are they going to replace me if I take Jean's spot?'"

That concern was eased by splitting the Administrative Manager's into two jobs as it was before Sharon took the job, then called Administrative Assistant. When she applied for that job, she was Fiscal Assistant and also filled in on data entry and worked the phones at the reception desk. She told Jocelyn Lyons, then Executive Director, "I really think I can do both. There's a lot of overlap and all this stuff that used to take me a long time to do I can pretty much do in my sleep."

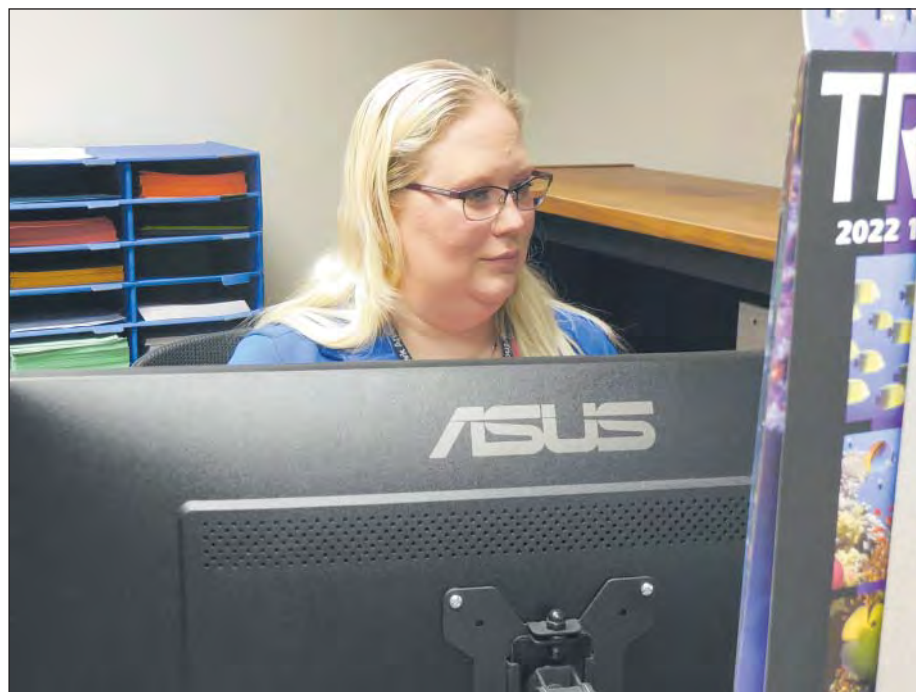
She loved her job so much that when Jean announced her retirement, Sharon told those who asked that she did not want her position. But when the third hire failed to make it through training, she agreed to

become the new Fiscal Manager. "I have a picture of Paul on my wall and I truly believe that it was Paul up there, Paul and Tom saying, 'What is she doing? Get this one out of there; keep doing it until she wakes up!'"

The late Paul Monhollan and Tom Ryan to whom she refers were JAAA Board Members for many years. Paul served as treasurer and worked closely with Sharon. "I keep that picture of Paul hanging on my wall as a reminder. I always look at that picture of him and wonder, 'What would Paul do? What would Paul tell me to do?' I adored Paul."

Whether it was Heavenly intervention that caused her to change her mind or the long discussion she had with her husband David, whom she married in 2014, she finally decided to take the Fiscal Manager position. David expressed confidence that she could handle the job, but told her he thought she was afraid of the change. "Our discussion helped me make up my mind," she says.

Susan Harris, JAAA Executive Director, is obviously happy that she accepted the position, saying, "I am pleased that Sharon Wright will be taking over the reins as Fiscal Manager as Jean leaves Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging to enjoy retirement. Sharon has been with JAAA for over 15 years. The positions and duties she has held at JAAA over the years have prepared her to become the Fiscal Manager, resulting in a natural transition. Sharon has been a critical player within the finan-



Sharon works at the computer where she will spend a lot of her time as Fiscal Manager.

cial operations of JAAA during the duration of her employment at JAAA and she has a comprehensive understanding of the budgets and processes necessary for the sound financial stewardship of the public funding JAAA receives."

Sharon clearly puts a lot of stock in her husband's advice. The couple met online when she was a junior at Highland Park High School and he was a senior at Rossville. And yet they might never have met had not her best friend, who was talking online with David, asked Sharon to email him and say she had been grounded and could not contact him herself. "Good old AIM," Sharon laughs, "Computers were just starting up and we were the age where we were growing up with them."

Sharon and David began corresponding online and the rest

is history. They dated, went to each other's proms, and David joined the Air Force National Guard while Sharon enrolled in Kaw Area Technical School (now Washburn Tech) and graduated in 2004 with an accounting clerk certificate. She took a one-year job with an insurance company and when the year was up, applied to JAAA through Key Staffing as a data entry clerk. When the agency learned she had her accounting clerk certificate, she was hired as Fiscal Assistant to the Fiscal Manager who preceded Jean.

Once Sharon secured the job with JAAA, she took advantage of a discounted tuition rate that Washburn offered to Kaw Area Tech graduates. She continued her accounting studies there until David's deployment to Afghanistan in 2012 and

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Sharon Wright

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other personal issues caused her to drop out. Last summer she again enrolled at Washburn and is working on her Bachelor's degree in accounting, "Do I need it?" she asks, "No. Is it helpful? Yes, because I can say I finished what I started. I've never just failed or quit at anything."

An added benefit to working on her Bachelor's degree is that Washburn has a not-for-profit management certification that one can earn while working on a Bachelor's. When she learned of that perk, it sweetened the educational deal for her. "I thought 'I'm so near to the end and I think both degrees will help me and JAAA as well.'"

An only child, Sharon is close to both of her parents. When very young, she became fascinated with accounting, which was her mother's work, and often used her mother's books to pretend to teach accounting.

During the ten years that JAAA had Guardian Angel fundraising dances, attendees enjoyed watching Sharon dance with her father. "I've always been a daddy's girl," she admits, "so when I turned 21, I went out with Dad and he taught me how to dance; we'd dance every weekend together. I know people thought it was uncool that I was hanging out with my dad, but those are memories that I'll always have. I've got great parents. I'm very lucky."

She is also enthusiastic about her association with

JAAA. "It's been great. Eye-opening, that's for sure. There are so many things that I would never have thought about if I hadn't been employed here; life insurance, for example, or making sure I am taking care of my retirement and planning for the future."

She says she has heard so many stories from women who have never worked and when their husbands died, they had nothing. It made her think about who would take care of her if necessary and who would take care of David if something happened to her. "I don't think people my age typically think about that," she says, "and you don't get that education in school."

"I like what I'm doing. I'm not planning on going anywhere," Sharon says. "At Washburn I have a student membership to the Kansas Society of Certified Public Accountants and there are different trainings that come up that I can sit in on. Before I switched jobs, I had gotten myself a membership to SHARM (Society of Human Resource Managers) because in administration there is a lot of HR. So I got a membership so I could self-train. If something comes up and I think it will be beneficial, I try to sit in on it. I do that because it will help me in my position and in turn that will help the agency."

"It's been nice working here because I like knowing that I'm working somewhere that's helping people. I may not be necessarily working with the clients but at least I know I'm working somewhere that does good. And we're not just in it for a profit. We're here to help people. And



On Sharon's wall is a picture of the late Paul Monhollan. She often looks up at it from her computer and wonders what he would do in a particular situation.

there's something to that. I feel like I just landed in the right spot."

Sharon admires Jean Stueve's fiscal acumen and says that while she does not believe she can fill her shoes, she can try to be as good. And Jean, who has been training Sharon to take over as Fiscal Manager has this to say about her: "Sharon is

doing a super job! Every task we go over, she gets. She has already made some logical adjustments to spreadsheets."

Jean Stueve can now retire without concern about the Fiscal Manager position she has held for so long and done so efficiently because she knows it will be in the very capable hands of Sharon Wright.

Paul Monhollan, 1939-2013, served Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging for many years on the Board and as treasurer. He worked in the accounting department for the Santa Fe/BNSF Railroad for 39 years and JAAA relied on his astuteness in financial matters. A US Navy veteran, Paul was a member of the Arab Shrine, the Oriental Band, the White Shrine of Jerusalem and was a dedicated Shriner Hospital Dad, transporting children and their families to Shriner hospitals in the U.S. He had an infinite patience for children who ran around and made noise, saying that he had seen too many who could not do either. He is missed.

JAAA wisely spends ARPA dollars to benefit seniors

By Marsha Henry Goff

What is the American Rescue Plan?

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) of 2021 is a \$1.9 trillion coronavirus rescue package designed to assist the United States' recovery from the devastating economic and health effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A minimum of \$50 million for each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico;
- \$30 million for the territories of Guam, American Samoa, the United States Virgin Islands, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands;
- An explicit mandate to prioritize socially disadvantaged households.

We have determined what services JAAA will provide through ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act). The Area Agencies on Aging received federal dollars through ARPA specific to older adults and related to the OAA

as far as services allowed to be provided through these dollars. JAAA plans to utilize this money for a variety of services, including:

- Assisting with older adults getting connected digitally with computer devices and internet access;
- Providing dollars for repair, maintenance, and renovation of the homes of older adults;
- Providing case management for caregivers;
- Starting additional Tai Chi classes, hopefully in the more rural areas of our service area;
- Increasing the medication management service we provide.

Additionally, JAAA is planning to shift some of the "regular" OAA dollars used for services such as transportation, legal services, home-delivered meals, and caregiver support groups to this ARPA funding. We have until 9/30/2024 to spend these funds. Total ARPA funds to Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging were approximately one million dollars.

From Tech to Tai Chi, JAAA cares about your mind and body

Many seniors enjoy keeping in touch with family via email, paying bills online and reading about their grandchildren's exploits on social media. But computers can be intimidating to some until they realize they are much smarter than the machine. JAAA wants to help familiarize you with computers and navigating the Internet.

Tai Chi is a healthy exercise that is exceptionally good for the body. It improves balance and reduces stress, improves cardiovascular fitness and posture with the added bonuses of increased flexibility and a reduction in pain and stiffness. There is a waiting list for the three classes at JAAA but the agency hopes to add more classes throughout the area.

Caregiver Support



Shawnee County

Topeka and Shawnee Public Library

1515 SW 10th Street

First Monday of each month, 2:00 p.m.

May 2 June 6

Topeka and Shawnee Public Library

1515 SW 10th Street

Second Monday of each month, 3:30 p.m.

May 9 June 13 July 11

Topeka and Shawnee Public Library

1515 SW 10th Street

Third Thursday of each month, 2:00 p.m.

May 19 June 16 July 21

Douglas County

First Southern Baptist Church

4300 W 6th Street, Lawrence

2nd Tuesday of the month, 1:00 p.m.

May 10 June 14 July 12

Baldwin Methodist Church

708 Grove, Baldwin

1st Wednesday of the month, 1:00 p.m.

May 4 June 1 July 6

Lawrence Public Library

707 Vermont Street, Lawrence

3rd Wednesday of the month, 3:00 p.m.

May 18 June 15 July 20

The meeting once a month is a gentle reminder that family caregivers need to put themselves first...even if only for a couple of hours each month!

Shirley Anderson finds satisfaction as a volunteer in Mario's Closet at LMH Health

By Marsha Henry Goff

Volunteer: a person who freely offers to take part without pay in an organization.

Shirley Anderson's cancer diagnosis and subsequent treatment forced her to leave her position as a legal secretary at a law firm in Lawrence. Accustomed to being busy, as soon as she was well, this active, petite woman found her life after cancer was more rewarding as a volunteer.

She has always volunteered in many capacities at her Trinity Lutheran Church in Lawrence where she had played the chimes between services while still in high school. She served as an officer of PTO at Wakarusa Elementary School where her children were students. Later, she volunteered at another school where she worked one-on-one with kindergarten students. "One was a little African-American boy named Shaquille who fought me every step of the way until I asked him, "Are you named after Shaquille O'Neal?"

That broke the ice and, while he was not able to read when she began working with him, by the end of the year he had read 21 books and she felt certain that he would be promoted to first grade. Her hard work with him was rewarded when he put his arms around her neck on the last day of school and said, "Mrs. Anderson, please don't

leave me."

Shirley has held many volunteer positions at LMH: Business office, breast center, food ambassador, information desk, gift shop and Mario's Closet where she has been for about four years. She also volunteers one day a week at the Front Information Desk. Yet her 28-year-volunteer service at LMH might not have happened had Allyson Leland, Director of Volunteers, not come to Shirley's mother's home in 1993 to set up Lifeline. "I was just taken by Allyson and thought she was a very lovely lady," Shirley explains. "She was Director of Volunteers at LMH and I felt I wanted to be a part of her team."

She approached Allyson about volunteering at LMH in January 1994 and, given her background as a legal secretary, was immediately put to work in the business office. But of all the volunteer positions she has held at LMH, Mario's Closet is closest to her heart because she feels she can relate to cancer patients, many of whom are going through chemotherapy, because she has traveled that road before them.

Mario's Closet was started by former KU basketball star Mario Chalmers, who made the miraculous three-pointer to send the 2008 NCAA Championship Game into overtime, which KU then won. The Mario V. Chalmers Foundation provided \$25,000 to build and stock Mario's Closet at LMH



Shirley Anderson serves LMH Health as a dedicated 28-year volunteer.

with items — everything from wigs to prosthetics — for cancer patients, as well as clothing, jewelry, skin care and many other items anyone would like. Mario's Closet opened in 2011 and was created in honor of those who died of cancer including his best friend Paul Peterson's mother who succumbed to breast cancer.

When a cancer patient who is taking chemo comes into the shop, the first thing Shirley asks them is whether they are having nausea. If they answer yes, she shows them Psi wrist bands which provide acupressure and relieve nausea. "The bands I have are cloth. They have a little button about the size of a quarter and you gently push down on it and you wear one on each wrist. I can't tell you how many

people buy them and come back and thank me," she says.

She also markets them to friends of cancer patients who visit a shop to buy gifts. The bands are clinically proven to reduce nausea and are also used to prevent sea sickness or motion sickness. "They kid me," Shirley laughs, "that I sell more of the bands than all the rest of volunteers combined."

She admits to buying much of the clothing offered at Mario's for her own wardrobe. "I bought a really nice jacket there, a knitted jacket with a hood. It is so warm in the winter and I like the idea it is red and blue. We had some nice slacks that I bought in every color we had." She mentions the T-shirts they carry, especially the one depict-

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Shirley stands in Mario's Closet among the many items offered for sale to cancer survivors and other hospital visitors.

Anderson

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ing a chicken kicking cancer that she wore to the grocery store. A female customer at the store asked her about the T-shirt and learning that she was a 12-year cancer survivor, congratulated her.

As Shirley placed her groceries on the counter, a voice behind her said, "Put her groceries on my ticket." It was the woman who had congratulated her. Shirley told her she did not need to do that and the woman said she wanted to. "I began to cry and told her that I had just buried my husband a couple of

weeks ago." Her beloved husband Dennis died on August 31, 2016 and she was so overwhelmed by the woman's generosity that as soon as she arrived home, she called her children, a grown son and daughter, to tell them.

Shirley's volunteer work has brought her awards and honors. She was LMH's 2013 Volunteer of the Year and was a nominee for United Way's prestigious Wally Galluzzi Award in 2007. But she does not volunteer for awards and honors; volunteering is her way of giving back. Working (and it is work) as a volunteer makes her feel happy to be helping others.

Allyson Leland describes



LMH Health utilizes this flyer in Mario's Closet to make a plea for volunteers to work in the Gift Shop and Mario's Closet.

the qualities Shirley brings to the hospital as a volunteer: "I have worked with Shirley for 28 years. She is currently volunteering at the Information desk of the main hospital and also in Mario's Closet. These two places are a great fit for her. At Mario's Closet she is able to connect with customers who are going through a difficult time. She can empathize and be helpful with suggestions for our customers. She also offers encouragement and a kind word.

"At the Information desk, Shirley utilizes her knowledge of LMH Health and her inquisitive nature to flesh out the answers to questions customers have. She has a very sharp

mind and a friendly manner that makes her very approachable and well liked. Shirley is always willing to help and her kind words to customers, other volunteers and staff are always much appreciated."

The hospital is indeed fortunate to have Shirley Anderson and a multitude of volunteers who direct and transport patients, work in surgery waiting rooms, deliver flowers and mail to patients, work in business offices, clerk in Mario's Closet and the gift shop as well as perform many other necessary jobs for which it would otherwise have to pay. LMH Health needs — and appreciates — every single one of its volunteers.

Constipation can be deadly for seniors

By Marsha Henry Goff

Number Two should be easy to do! But it isn't always. Ads for laxatives and stool softeners are prevalent on television and radio and in magazines and newspapers. Constipation rises with age. It is estimated that 50% of adults over 80, 40% of seniors residing in the community and 60% of those in institutions (nursing homes, hospitals, hospices, etc.) suffer from constipation.

Constipation is more likely in those who take regular medication, are female, non-white, lower socioeconomic class and those with symptoms of depression and anxiety. But it can happen to anyone regardless of age, gender, race or medical status.

The condition is clearly more dangerous to those seniors who are frail because straining can trigger a rise in blood pressure resulting in cardiovascular events such as a brain bleed and arrhythmia. But bowel blockage and fecal impaction can be deadly at any age if not promptly and properly treated.

The signs that you may have chronic constipation as opposed by the occasional constipation that almost everyone will occasionally experience are these:

- Passing fewer than three stools a week
- Having lumpy or hard stools
- Straining to have bowel movements
- Feeling as though there's

a blockage in your rectum that prevents bowel movements

- Feeling as though you can't completely empty the stool from your rectum

- Needing help to empty your rectum, such as using your hands to press on your abdomen and using a finger to remove stool from your rectum

If you've experienced two or more of these symptoms for the last three months, your constipation may be considered chronic.

Stool may be slowed or stopped altogether by blockages in the colon or rectum and need quick attention. Blockages may be due to the following causes:

- Tiny tears in the skin around the anus (anal fissure)
- A blockage in the intestines (bowel obstruction)
- Colon cancer
- Narrowing of the colon (bowel stricture)
- Other abdominal cancer that presses on the colon
- Rectal cancer
- Rectum bulge through the back wall of the vagina (rectocele)

People with certain diseases like Multiple Sclerosis or Parkinson's disease or neurological problems due to stroke or spinal cord injury may have bowel emptying difficulties

because the nerves are affected that cause muscles to contract and move stool through the bowel.

Seniors are more likely to have chronic constipation because they are more likely to take medications to control pain, blood pressure and depression. Even some supplements (iron tablets, for example) can cause constipation. Seniors are also at risk because they

are more likely to have a sedentary lifestyle. Getting out of a chair and moving is good for you on so many levels. Dehydration and eating a diet low in fiber are also risk factors for people of any age.

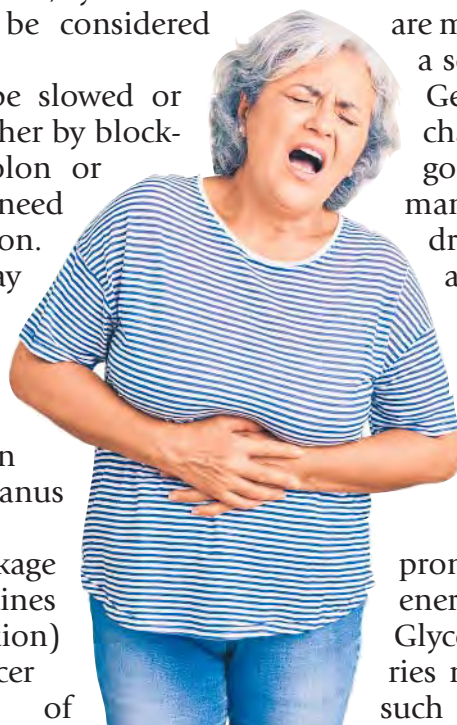
Should fecal impaction occur, it must be treated promptly. Stool softeners will not work. Glycerin suppositories may work and in such instances a Fleet enema which can be purchased at a store or online or a soapy enema may be appropriate. Fecal impaction must be addressed early or it can lead to serious or even deadly consequences. The pressure of impaction can even cause urinary incontinence or an inability to urinate. Stercoral colitis develops from fecal impaction which can cause deformation of the colon and bowel perforation resulting in a mortality rate from

32% to 60%. The condition occurs in people with chronic constipation, elderly patients with dementia, bedbound or nursing home patients or young patients with psychiatric conditions.

Never ignore blood in your stool or assume it comes from hemorrhoids. Rectal tears are not uncommon. The massive colonic distension can cause diffuse compression of the colon's vasculature within the bowel wall, leading to edema, inflammation and ischemia. The most serious complications of stercoral colitis are perforation and ischemic colitis.

Stercoral colitis is said to be rare but many doctors believe now that it is simply underdiagnosed. Whether rare or more common, it can be avoided by ensuring that you are not chronically constipated. If you believe you are, visit your doctor and insist on treatment. Medical personnel often say that patients need good advocates. But sometimes you can be your own best advocate. After all, you are walking around in your body and you know when something is wrong.

Constipation is no joking matter. Do what you can to prevent it and avoid it becoming a chronic condition. Eat foods rich in fiber, drink plenty of water, be as active as your body allows. A daily walk will do wonders for your body and mind. Just remember that it is better to prevent constipation than to treat it.



Grams and Clarissa

By Marsha Henry Goff

Once upon a time, my community had a program called Ring-a-Day where people volunteered to call seniors each day to make sure they were OK. My friend Roberta was a volunteer caller and developed quite a friendship with the woman she called each morning. It occurred to me during the pandemic as well as every hot or cold spell that it is regrettable we no longer have that Ring-a-Day.

Lawrence then had a great many programs like that — Adopt a Grandparent was another — where individuals reached out to other individuals. I always thought it was too bad that my grandmother's small town of Sabetha didn't have a program like Ring-a-Day. Grandma was 85 and lived alone. So did her friend Clarissa who was 99 and also lived alone in her own home a block and a half from Grams.

I suggested that Grams call Clarissa at 8 a.m. every morning and that Clarissa call Grams at 8 p.m. They liked the idea and it worked well until Grams didn't get an answer one morning. She envisioned Clarissa lying on the floor and hurriedly walked to her home afraid of what she might find.

When I talked to Grams that evening, she was no longer worried, just provoked. "I hiked all the way down there," Grams said in disgust, "and found her working in her garden. She forgot I was going to call!"

Wouldn't it be nice if every 99-year-old could be out working in their garden each morning?

New to Medicare? Confused about all the options?



Join Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging

for

Medicare Mondays

First Monday of every month at 1:00 p.m.

Topeka Shawnee County Public Library

or

New to Medicare

Second Monday at 6:00 p.m. in

March, June, September, December

Learn about Medicare and the many options available.

We will provide unbiased information about the Medicare options available to you to assist you in determining what Medicare options will fit your needs and work for you.



It is time for seniors to demand the respect they deserve

By Marsha Henry Goff

Recently I was sitting with my foot on the brake at a red light when I was struck from behind and pushed through two lanes of southbound traffic at a normally busy intersection. A quick check showed there was no traffic approaching in the northbound two lanes, so I drove across those lanes, parked my midsize SUV and waited for the driver who struck me to pull up behind me. After sitting through a couple of stoplight sequences, she was able to do that, although her car later had to be towed from the scene.

The officer who worked the accident asked me if I was OK. I said I had a headache but I wasn't sure if it was caused by the wreck or if it was *because I had* a wreck. The right side of my neck and my right shoulder felt a little stiff and tolerably painful; otherwise I seemed fine. He urged me to be checked out at the hospital but I told him I did not want to do that. However, once at my appointment, the subject of my interview and the receptionist each thought I should be checked out. I decided they were right when my neck and shoulder developed a warm, weird feeling. The hypochondriac in me worried I might be bleeding internally.

The hospital emergency department staff couldn't have been more competent and efficient. They were also very nice ... even the doctor who noticed the "bubble" in my shoulder which he said was a defense against my neck pain. After my first-ever CT scan, I was diag-

nosed with a whiplash and post-traumatic headache. However the fourth time the doctor mentioned my age, I challenged him. "Oh, yes," he said quickly, "we have people in their 50s in here who look older than you."

"I'm not talking about how I look," I replied, "I'm talking about my overall health and having all my marbles." I am not super sensitive about my age, but if I have an injury or illness, I want that to be the focus of medical professionals treating me. Fix the problem, then worry about how old I am. I do realize that age may complicate any medical problem but the focus needs to be on treating the injury or illness and working to prevent any complications that may arise.

The phrase "age is just a number" is trite to some; to me it is truth. My late nephew taught me that. Mike was diagnosed with MS at 25, in a wheelchair by 30, bedfast by 32, dead at 43. It is illness, not age, that is the enemy. Will we have some physical complaints as we get older? Most likely we will, but if we can get around (even if we utilize a cane, mobility scooter or wheelchair to do so) and enjoy life, we are absolutely blessed regardless of our age.

I have a dear friend who is a centenarian. She mows her lawn with a John Deere tractor and wields a mean weed-whacker. But when she injured her knee and went to a doctor, he asked her if at her age she didn't think her bones might be getting a little crunchy. Later, she told me she restrained herself from asking him if he wanted



his teeth to get a little crunchy. Spunk is good to have at any age and especially if you are 100.

But spunk can be hard to come by if you are a senior ill enough to be in the hospital. If you are fortunate to be treated by a hospitalist who, by training and temperament, is a geriatric hospitalist (that is a specialty, not a reference to his or her age) you will likely escape the common conditions that can devastate seniors during hospital stays. But many, perhaps most, hospitals do not have on staff even one hospitalist who specializes in geriatrics. An area hospital proudly states that 90% of a particular hospitalist's patients are seniors. His specialty? Pediatrics. That doesn't make sense to me but apparently does to the hospital administrator.

One study shows that hospitalized seniors treated by their own doctor have a 9% chance of dying in the first 30 days after dismissal from a hospital; if treated by a hospitalist, that chance of dying increases to 11%. The study did not show

a senior's chances of dying if treated by a hospitalist who specializes in geriatrics, possibly because there is a shortage of geriatricians. If you are hospitalized — or a loved one is — you need not be frightened but are warned to be vigilant to ensure that the hospitalists are informed and engaged. Communication is key between a patient and the hospitalist and, because they work shifts, between the various hospitalists who are responsible for an individual's treatment. Continuity of care is absolutely essential. Just make sure the medical professionals treating you are focused on your medical problems rather than your age.

Since 1976, Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging has done an excellent job of fulfilling its mission to enable seniors to stay in their homes as long as possible. JAAA achieves that through the many programs it offers (the popular CHAMPSS dining program is one), the informational presentations staff members make and the many provid-

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ers the agency funds. JAAA can help seniors and caregivers with many aspects of their lives to make them better and safer.

But seniors do not have the type of good, non-governmental organizations that advocate for their needs in the in-your-face manner that has provided stunning results for sections of society with much smaller numbers than seniors. Although many

organizations claim that the fair advocacy for seniors and charge membership fees to do that, I do not see results that they accomplish much. I checked out Gray Panthers, founded in 1970 by Maggie Kuhn who was forced to retire from her job at a church because she was 65. The name Gray Panthers certainly sounds like it would be an activist group that would strongly advocate on senior issues. But no.

While the Gray Panthers still exist and states that it advocates for Medicare and Social Security

preservation and the fair treatment of people in nursing homes, it has widened its focus and now is engaged in anti-war activism, LGBT rights advocacy, environmentalism and promotion of single-payer health care. In short, that group has lost its emphasis on seniors and spread itself far too thin.

Until the group that I envision is formed, it will be up to individual seniors to demand respect, especially from the medical professionals who treat them because that can be a life

or death matter. Don't be afraid to make waves. One of my heroines is an elderly retired teacher who staged a hunger strike at the nursing home where she lived to protest the quality and quantity of food that was served. It worked!

Such boldness when dealing with those institutions and individuals responsible for caring for seniors may work for you, too. Just be polite and firm while demanding respect regardless of your age. Chances are you will get it.

Having a pet to care for benefits the health of seniors

By Marsha Henry Goff

The isolation of the pandemic lockdown caused one out of ten people between the ages of 50 and 80 to get a new pet between March 2020 and January 2021 according to the National Poll on Healthy Aging. And that is a very good thing because studies have shown the loving bond between pets and their owners can lower stress, increase fitness and bring happiness to the pet owners.

Among the health benefits of having a pet are: decreased blood pressure, lowered cholesterol and triglyceride levels, decreased feelings of loneliness, relieved feelings of anxiety and increased opportunities for socialization. Pets can alleviate depression, loneliness and even help people with dementia.

Caring for and bonding with an animal can help fill a void and dogs in particular can give seniors unconditional love. The exercise of walking a dog can increase fitness of both the dog

and its owner. It also opens up opportunities to interact with other people, both those with a dog and those without.

For those seniors whose physical disability forces them to be more sedentary, nothing is more relaxing than petting a purring cat snuggled on a lap. A small dog can also achieve that purpose. Just don't expect any purring.

Caring for a pet can give a senior a sense of purpose and provide companionship. But there is a price to be paid for acquiring and caring for a pet that some seniors cannot afford. Not to worry. There are organizations that can help out. One of those organizations is Pets for the Elderly (PFE), a foundation that helps pay the adoption fees — including the cost of pre-adoption veterinary examinations and spaying or neutering — to participating animal shelters throughout the US.

Unfortunately, the closest shelter participating with PFE is in Wichita. But many shelters have programs of their own to

assist seniors who wish to adopt a pet. According to Lauren Burnley, Customer Care Associate on the Adoption side of Lawrence Humane Society, they can help in many ways. Seniors 55+ get 50% off of adoption fees, for example, the adoption fee for cats 7 to 9 years of age is \$60 (\$30 for seniors); for cats 10 years and older, the fee is \$30 (\$15 for seniors).

The adoption fee for dogs 7 to 10 years who are 25 pounds or less is \$100 (\$50 for seniors) and for dogs 26 pounds and more the fee is \$75 (\$37.50 for seniors). Adoption fee for dogs 11 years and older is \$25 (fee is waived for seniors). The pets adopted are up to date on age appropriate vaccinations, spayed or neutered and microchipped.

Lawrence Humane Society also has a Pet Resource side for pet owners who cannot afford to feed their animal and, when necessary and funds are available, can provide cat litter and an item like a dog collar if one is broken or lost. The Society also has a

social worker who oversees the Crisis Pet Retention Program on a case by case basis. For example, if a pet was attacked by another animal or injured in some other way and the owner cannot afford a veterinarian bill, the Society can cover the cost. Application can be made online. Also pet deposits (many apartments or rental houses require them) can be covered if the pet owner cannot afford the cost and funds are available.

Lawrence Humane Society also can take care of temporary boarding fees or foster care for a pet if the owner is hospitalized. Of course, all of these services require that funds are available.

The Society also has a special program, Pets for Vets, that gives veterans who served our country 50% off the adoption of any animal one year or older.

The shelter in your area may have its own programs to help seniors adopt pets they can love and care for. Be sure to ask about such programs if you are in the market for a pet.

Legal Outreach Clinic

Provided by Kansas Legal Services
with funding from the Shawnee County Advocacy Council on Aging (SCACA)



When: Wednesday, May 11, 2022

1:30 pm – 4:30 pm

Where: Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging

2910 SW Topeka Blvd

Topeka, KS 66611

Meet with an attorney for FREE! Kansas Legal Services will be available to meet with community members age 60+ about their specific legal concerns. A thirty-minute informational presentation will be held at 1:30 pm, followed by an opportunity to have advance directive legal documents such as Powers of Attorney and Living Wills prepared on the spot FOR FREE. Legal advice on additional topics such as Probate, Collection, and Family Law, or any other civil legal matter, can be provided.

Please come take advantage of this great opportunity.

Documents that can be prepared for free include:

Financial Power of Attorney

Health Care Power of Attorney

Living Will

**Assistance provided on a first come, first served basis. Individuals will be required to complete a short application form prior to meeting with an attorney.*

For additional information, please contact:

Kansas Legal Services (785) 354-8531

Laura Hansen, Paralegal