



WELLNESS WORKS

around the state

MAINE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH TRUST

SPRING 2011

GetBetterMaine.org Maine's Guide to Quality Healthcare

When you make health care decisions, such as knowing what kind of care is best for you, where do you get information? Talking with your doctor is the best approach. Some people ask friends while others cross their fingers and guess. We want to introduce a resource to help you compare doctors and hospitals in Maine.

The Maine Health Management Coalition is pleased to announce that everyone in Maine can now look up comparisons of local primary care physician practices and hospitals to see who is doing a better job, and to help you make more informed health decisions. The website is called GetBetterMaine and can be found at www.getbettermaine.org. It is produced by the non-profit Maine Health Management Coalition Foundation, supported by the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust along with many others in the community.

You and your family deserve care that is safe and effective – health care that cures what ails you or helps you stay as healthy as possible. Although everyone wants safe high quality care we know that quality isn't the same in every practice or hospital across the country and even here in Maine.

The website shows that some medical providers have much to improve and others are some of the top rated in the country, so it's time for us to improve how we select the doctors and hospitals we use. You have another role, too: be a partner to your doctor. Ask questions, make sure you understand the answers and follow your doctor's advice. Look at the website getbettermaine.org to help you make informed decisions about your health and healthcare and get resources like free health education classes, parenting advice and research assistance from health educators.

The website getbettermaine.org will be continually updated with new information, including new providers and new measures tested. The goal of this initiative is to improve the quality of care overall in Maine. By publishing these results, health care consumers can be better informed and choose high quality providers. This, in turn, will encourage other providers to improve their practice results by improving care. To find out more about the non-profit Maine Health Management Coalition, go to www.mehmc.org.

The only exercise some people get is jumping to conclusions, running down their friends, side-stepping responsibility, and pushing their luck!

~Author Unknown



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Staff Update

We are pleased to announce that **Nicole Ouellette** transferred from the Member Service division to the Billing and Enrollment division. Effective April 19, 2011, Nicole began in her new position as **Billing and Enrollment Representative** reporting to Linda Mack. Nicole has over 10 years of career experience both in and out of the Trust. Nicole has been with the Health Trust for five years. First she served as an Office Assistant in the Billing/Enrollment area for over a year and then she moved to a Member Service Representative for the last four years. Prior to joining the Trust, Nicole was a Billing Specialist and Coordinator in the health care industry. Nicole is looking forward to learning new skills and expanding her knowledge in the Health Trust.

MHMC Consumer Healthcare Opinion Survey

Tell us what you think about the state of healthcare in Maine

The Maine Health Management Coalition (MHMC) is once again conducting its groundbreaking Consumer Healthcare Opinion survey. As a participant of the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust, you can take part in this exciting study and share your thoughts about healthcare quality, talking with providers, and taking care of your health.

Since the survey started in 2005, nearly 15,000 people across Maine have been a part of this project. The survey responses have been used to improve healthcare in Maine and to help patients and providers communicate better.

Please take part in this survey. It will just take a few minutes and your responses will be confidential. You can take it online at www.mehmc.org.

You will not be asked to identify yourself in the survey. To help keep all responses confidential, an independent research firm (Crescendo Consulting Group) will be managing the survey. The Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust will not have access to any individual responses.

The MHMC is a not-for-profit organization focused on improving the value of healthcare in Maine. The Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust has been a member of the MHMC since 1996.

Thank you for being a part of this important project.

Telephonic Diabetes Education and Support[®] Program

⇨ *Continued for 2011* ⇨

The Health Trust continues to offer a pilot program where voluntary participants are offered financial incentives (waiver of co-pays for medications and supplies) to complete a 12-month telephonic diabetes self-management program with a local educator (one in-person visit and 12 monthly calls) administered by Medical Care Development in Augusta.

Health Trust participants, early retirees, and adult family members between the ages of 18 and 65, not enrolled in Medicare, being treated for Type 1 Diabetes, Type 2 Diabetes, or Pre-Diabetes are invited to participate. The program is available through 2011 with voluntary rolling admission throughout the year.

For additional information, please contact Health Trust Member Service at 1-800-852-8300 or email to htservice@memun.org or visit our website at www.mmeht.org.

Trust Health Educator Receives Professional Designation

We are pleased to announce that **Abby DiPasquale**, MMEHT *Wellness Works* health promotion educator, recently attained a professional designation as a **Master Certified Health Education Specialist (MCHES)** through the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing (NCHEC).

The NEHEC's voluntary certification program establishes a national standard for individual health education practitioners. Currently over 9,000 practitioners have attained the professional Certified Health Education Specialist designation. Master candidates are differentiated from entry-level health education specialists in that the newly-created MCHES certification recognizes experience, expertise, and advanced-level continuing professional development efforts. In order to qualify for the MCHES designation, Abby needed to: demonstrate specific academic and career experience requirements in health education; prepare for and pass a competency-based exam related to advanced level responsibilities; and show a commitment to ongoing personal professional development in her field.

Abby has been with the Trust since 2004. We often receive positive feedback from employers and employees regarding the content and delivery of Abby's on-site health education classes. Now, Abby has added to her professional accomplishments by qualifying for a national industry designation. "Congratulations to Abby for achieving the MCHES designation," says Anne Charles, Health Promotion Manager. "Abby is dedicated to her career and produces positive and meaningful contributions to the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust, the *Wellness Works* department, our employers, and each individual Health Trust participant. We commend Abby for her self-motivated efforts."

Remember that living a healthy lifestyle involves doing things differently, not perfectly.



Save the ER for Emergencies

and you could save time and money

If you have a non-threatening illness, walk-in centers are a smart option.

Emergency room (ER) wait times are at an all-time high, and ER visits could cost more than you think. If you're not having a true emergency, you can still get quality care without visiting the ER. Walk-In centers could take less time and cost less.

Shorter wait times

Studies have shown that the average wait time in a hospital emergency department is three hours, and many cases could have been handled in a walk-in center. Wait times at a walk-in center are generally much shorter, and you'll also be in a more comfortable environment.

Lower costs

With a walk-in center, you'll pay a specialist copay. For specific costs and benefit information, call the Health Trust at 1-800-852-8300.

Same high level of care

Walk-in centers are fully staffed by the same types of professionals you'd see in an emergency room or at your doctor's office: licensed doctors, doctor assistants and nurse practitioners.

Treatment for all non-life threatening emergencies

The centers typically treat a variety of non-life threatening issues including minor lacerations, minor burns, sprains and strains, sports injuries, sore throats, earaches and flu.

No appointment needed

Walk-in centers can provide care for a variety of injuries and illnesses. Check out the Maine Municipal Employee Health Trust's website at www.mmeht.org, click on "What's New", click on "Medical Plan Walk-in Centers" to find a list of walk-in centers and locations.

Source: Anthem 2/2011



Let a nurse help you decide

Not sure if you should go to a walk-in center, emergency room or your doctor's office? Call the 24/7 Nurseline at 800-607-3262 – any time, day or night. Discuss your symptoms with a registered nurse who will help you decide which type of care makes the most sense.

Emergency room rule of thumb

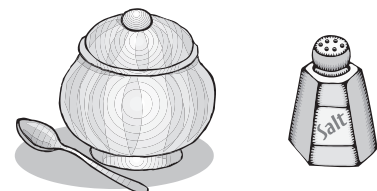
Call 911 or go to the emergency room if you think delaying care could put your health at serious risk.



Emergency

Lower Your Sugar to Lower Your Blood Pressure

We have heard for years that if we want to lower our blood pressure, we need to reduce the amount of salt in our diets, however a new study shows that sugar may also play a role. A study published in *Circulation*, May 2010 found that people who drank an average of one or less 12-ounce sugar-sweetened drink a day – such as sodas and fruit drinks – tended to have lower blood pressure than those people who drank more. So if you are watching your blood pressure, cut the sodium and excess sugar for added health benefits!



Green Living Through Technology

Technology is here to make our lives easier. There's no reason it can't help us to save energy, materials, and money too. Here are a few things to think about when sitting in front of your computer:

- Use electronic scanning and e-mail to distribute reports, memos, and tasks, whenever you're sending documents to one person or hundreds, this will make things easier, save trees, and reduce paper costs.
- Check your work before you print to avoid paper waste.
- Read electronically sent documents onscreen instead of printing.
- Use digital storage devices such as USB drives instead of filing large amounts of paper to free up space and save trees.

Lyme Disease: Beyond the Rash

Lyme disease has been reported in every state in the U.S., with the Northeast, upper Midwest, and mid-Atlantic regions accounting for a vast majority of cases. It is caused by a bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, transmitted by the bite of the minuscule deer tick. Nearly 30,000 confirmed cases were reported in 2008, easily making Lyme Disease the most common insect-borne infection in the U.S.

The disease has two distinct phases, early and late. The best known early symptom, a bull's eye rash, affects up to 80 percent of the victims. Other early symptoms include headaches, chills and fever, acute arthritis, and heart and spinal nerve-root problems. Late disease can include chronic arthritis, peripheral nerve injury, and brain and spinal cord symptoms.

The most common nerve complication is paralysis of the facial nerve, or Bell's palsy. The organism can also attack nerve roots adjacent to the spine (one example is someone had a pain on one side of the buttock that radiated down the leg to the knee with leg weakness and ankle reflex decreased).

Lyme disease affects the heart in up to 10 percent of people in whom the disease goes untreated. Symptoms can range from none to worrisome. Less often, it can affect the heart muscle itself or cause inflammation of the pericardium, or heart cover. Disturbances in heart rhythm can occur, but rarely as severe as in the example of a young patient who collapsed with a complete heart block because of a tick bite.

When to Look For Lyme

If you live in areas that harbor deer, deer ticks, and white-footed mice, see your doctor if you develop any of the following, even if you don't recall a tick bite:

- A rash resembling a target that expands over a few days.
- Flu-like symptoms outside of flu season.
- Acute arthritis (pain, swelling, warmth and redness) of a large joint, usually a knee.
- Acute onset of pain along the course of a single nerve.
- Bell's palsy, or paralysis of one side of the face (rarely both).
- Erratic pulse, light-headedness, or chest pains (plus an abnormal electrocardiogram indicating problems with the conduction system, an abnormal heart rhythm, or evidence of inflammation of the heart cover).



When it comes to Lyme disease, be aware of other symptoms besides the common bull's eye target and be your best advocate – go see your doctor. **Source: www.consumerreports.com**

Working Out is for the Dogs!

If your dog is overweight, you may need more exercise. New research published in the *Journal of Physical Activity & Health* shows that among dog owners who took their furry friends for regular walks, the majority (60%) met the federal guidelines for regular, moderate or vigorous physical activity. Almost half of dog walkers got an average of 30 minutes of daily exercise at least five days a week, while only about a third of those without dogs exercised that much.

It's widely believed that pets are good for the soul, and this new information makes a solid case for their beneficial effects on the body, too. That's assuming, of course, that you indulge (and join in) your pup's natural need to romp: Dog owners in the study who didn't walk their dogs reported significantly less exercise overall than non-dog-owners. If you have a dog, let his frisky nature be your guide. Helping you be more active is just one of the many ways he can enrich your life.

Obesity Epidemic for Pets, Too.

Roughly one third of cats and dogs in the U.S. are overweight or obese, according to a recent issue of the *Veterinary Clinics of North America*. Excess weight harms their health too, including an increased risk of arthritis, heart disease, and premature death.



Spring into Allergies

After a long, cold winter, nothing compares to getting back outside to enjoy sunshine, fresh air, and warm weather. Unless, of course, you're one of the unlucky many who suffer each year with spring allergies. For them, the season's beauty is rivaled only by the physical misery it can bring. Congestion, runny nose, watery eyes, headaches, and other common symptoms can rob people of what is arguably the best season to take up a new exercise or simply to have fun outdoors.

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology (AAAAI) estimates the number of Americans with some type of allergy at around 50 million. The most common trigger of spring allergies is pollen, which can be seen as the ubiquitous yellow powder that seems to blanket everything that stands still during spring days with particularly high pollen counts. It may look harmless enough, but pollen can take a toll on your workplace. You may find that the onset of spring coincides with more and more employees calling in sick. Spring hay fever can also weigh heavily on productivity, as workers who are suffering with allergy symptoms are understandably not at their best, performance-wise.

Face spring head-on and well-informed with these tips about allergies from the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology:

- Over-the-counter (OTC) oral antihistamines are less effective than prescription medicines in controlling a stuffy nose. OTC antihistamines may control some allergy symptoms but have little effect on relieving a stuffy nose or inflammation that often occurs with allergies.
- OTC decongestant nasal sprays are not addictive. However, overuse leads to the need to use more and more nasal spray in order to get congestion relief. Don't use an OTC decongestant nasal spray for more than three days in a row.
- Eating local honey will not combat spring allergies.
- Pollen allergies can lead to food allergies. About one-third of people with pollen allergies also may react to certain foods because some pollens and foods have similar proteins. The reaction is usually mild and may include itchy, tingling mouth, throat or lips.
- Skin tests are more sensitive than blood tests for diagnosing allergies.
- Allergy shots are not necessarily more costly or time-consuming than taking medicine to relieve allergy symptoms. Over time, in fact, they may reduce an allergic person's health-care costs.

Source: Personal Best, March 2011

Long Distance Caregiving

When you live miles away from your aging loved one, the separation can complicate caregiving. Make regularly scheduled visits. Depending upon the aging person's needs, your visits could be occasional or frequent. Use your visits to assess the needs and ability of your loved one to provide self care. Help arrange for any assistance your loved one may need. Try to avoid spending your entire visit taking care of business. Do something enjoyable together. Take turns with friends and relatives so that the person is checked on regularly.

Plan on regular checking-up times. Set up set times and days that you will call. If your loved one has a hearing problem, arrange for a special phone for the hearing impaired. During the call, listen for changes in the way he or she speaks or interacts with you. For some people, email or even old fashioned letters are also a good way to check in.

Take important information home. Keep a notebook with the names and phone numbers of doctors, landlords, neighbors, caregivers and other service providers. Order a local phone book or look online for the names and contact information of services in the area.

These are some ways you can support the primary caregiver when you are unable to be there:

- **Ask how you can help.** Offer ideas if the primary caregiver is struggling with an issue.
- **If you notice a problem, offer solutions and support.** Avoid criticism.
- **Offer emotional support.** Call and check in regularly. Be someone the primary caregiver can confide in.
- **Provide financial support.** Contribute to the household expenses or pay for respite care.
- **Make phone calls.** Spend time on the phone visiting with the person being cared for.
- **Give breaks.** Take over caregiving duties for a day or a weekend each month, or even a week every few months. This provides breaks for the primary caregiver.
- **Do those tasks that can be done at a distance.** Research the disease or condition, or make phone calls to find out about support services.
- **Thank the primary caregiver.** Show your appreciation regularly.



Quarterly Check-up: Hay Fever

On-Call is a medical self-care program for members of the Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust. It helps individuals to assess a variety of health concerns by answering three basic questions:

- *Is this a medical emergency?*
- *Should I see or call my doctor?*
- *Can I treat myself at home and if so, how?*

The 2011 spring quarter On-Call topic is Hay Fever:

What is Hay Fever?

Allergic rhinitis (hay fever) is the most common respiratory allergy and is your body's response to an inhaled substance that causes an allergic reaction. For most people, allergy season can be a period of minor discomfort. But for others, pollen, dust, and animal dander can cause significant physical problems and be a year-round challenge. Among adults, dust (especially dust mites), animal dander, molds, feathers, and pollen are the most common allergens. Among infants, animal dander and dust are the most common allergens.

In cases of severe allergy, professional medical consultation is recommended to determine the actual substances that cause the allergic reaction. Skin or blood tests may help determine the specific allergen. In some cases, hypo-sensitization injections help people with allergies become less sensitive to the allergen. Most people who have mild to moderate hay fever can follow the home care procedures listed. Whenever possible, avoiding the known allergens is the best course of action.

Signs and Symptoms of Hay Fever:

- Runny nose, sneezing.
- Watery, itchy eyes.
- Wheezing.
- Stuffy head, clogged sinuses, headache.
- Throat irritation, from postnasal drip.

Talk with Your Doctor if:

- You have difficulty breathing or severe wheezing.
- Nasal discharge is green or yellow.
- You would like more effective relief from your allergy symptoms than you are getting with home care.
- Your symptoms are getting worse.

Medication:

- Antihistamines may help relieve your symptoms. Use with caution; read the labels.
- Nasal decongestants for stuffy head (don't use them for more than three days).
- Do not give antihistamines or decongestions to children without consulting the doctor first.
- Cough drops will soothe your throat if it's irritated by postnasal drip.

Note Well:

- Blow your nose gently to clear mucus. Do not blow hard, which may cause an ear infection or bloody nose.
- If cutting the lawn, gardening, dusting, or vacuuming aggravates your symptoms, wear an air-filtering mask while doing those chores.
- If you're allergic to molds, consider using an air conditioner with an electrostatic filter during the summer or damp weather.

Rest:

- You may need more rest when an allergic reaction strikes.

Prevention:

- If possible, avoid contact with allergens that you know will bother you.
- Keep house pets out of bedrooms.
- Try to keep your pet clean and groomed.
- Dust allergy can be reduced by wrapping your pillows and mattresses in special covers and washing sheets weekly in hot water (at least 130F).
- Consider using a portable air filter in your bedroom.

Source: Wellinformed 2008

South Portland Recommits to Wellness

After taking a brief hiatus, the City of South Portland's Wellness Committee is back in action and running strong. With a renewed commitment including the development of long-term goals for the program, City employees are excited to participate in health and wellness activities sponsored by their employer.

Over time, the benefits of a well-planned and structured wellness program are sure to yield positive results. With that in mind, the City of South Portland Wellness Committee defined several long-term goals for the wellness program including:

- Improving productivity and employee wellness;
- Decreasing health insurance costs;
- Decreasing workers' compensation claims;
- Decreasing employee sick time usage; and
- Increasing employee morale.

These may seem like ambitious objectives, but the South Portland Wellness Committee and City employees seem to have the right focus and direction to make them happen. In some early efforts, many employees participated in a variety of activities ranging from monthly on-site education classes to special events such as an employee picnic and a family winter activity.

Recently the Committee introduced a revolutionary team fitness program sponsored by the Maine Games, a recognized organization of the National Congress of State Games which is a member of the United States Olympic Committee's Multi-Sport Organizations Council. State Games, an amateur sports grass-roots movement that includes more than 30 organizations from California to Maine, offers amateur athletes of all ages and abilities the opportunity to compete on a statewide stage, to practice good sportsmanship, and to develop healthy habits that can last a lifetime. These non-profit organizations provide athletic competition and healthy educational opportunities to nearly a half-million people each year.

LightenME! (www.lightenme.org) is a health and wellness program whose goal is to encourage Mainers to develop nutritional eating habits and increase physical activity through teamwork and friendly competition in effort to combat the country's growing obesity problem. The key component of Lighten ME! Is teamwork. Having other people who share a common goal, who will work together and who will encourage each other throughout the process is vitally important to the success of the program. South Portland is very proud of the 47 employees who are involved in the LightenME! program. Currently many employees walk on their own time and track their progress with pedometers. These employees often utilize the Greenbelt Walkway, a paved 5.7 mile path that runs throughout the City or the indoor track at the South Portland Community Center when getting outside can be tricky.

As a result of the monthly education classes, special events, and an innovative team program, employee morale is already noticeably increasing with a new appreciation for the health and wellness messages that are being offered at the various worksites throughout the City. Participation in monthly wellness classes continues to increase and employees are making great strides to improve their own health and wellness. Congratulations to the South Portland Wellness Committee and the employees who are participating in the programs. Your dedicated efforts may allow you to attain your long-term goals perhaps sooner than later. You are off to a great start and productive year.

A grant from Wellness Works, the health education and promotion program of Maine Municipal Employees Health Trust, provided the necessary funding to help offset the cost of the interventions that the City of South Portland offered. If you would like more information on how to get a Wellness Program started at your worksite, please contact Anne Charles at 1-800-852-8300 or via e-mail at acharles@memun.org.

The Fittest Foods for Kids

Nutritious foods give your family the most vitamins, minerals and other nutrients for the fewest calories. Naturally nutritious foods that make your child's calories count are:

- Brightly colored fruits and 100% fruit juices
- Vibrant-colored vegetables
- Lean meat, skinless poultry, fish, eggs, beans, and nuts
- Fat-free and low fat milk, cheese, and yogurt
- Whole, fortified, and fiber-rich grain foods





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Visit our website at
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Newsletter Search Contest

Do you want a chance to win a Wellness Works backpack? Take a few minutes and answer the following questions (all answers can be found in articles in this newsletter). Send the answers along with your name, address and phone number to: Wellness Works, 60 Community Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330. You can also e-mail your answers to us at: wellness@memun.org. Entries must be received by May 20, 2011. One winner will be drawn at random.

Congratulations to Thomas Monteith, an employee from the Town of Millinocket, who won the Winter Newsletter Search Contest!

Your Name: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Employer (or former employer, if you are a retiree): _____

1. What is the new website that will help to guide quality healthcare in Maine? _____

2. What is a good rule of thumb to remember when considering using an emergency room? _____

3. List three reasons why a walk-in clinic may be a better option than an emergency room: _____

4. List three signs of hay fever: _____

