



The Path to Wellness

by Jenny Guenther

What could bring a large group of people to a casino other than gambling? At Chinook Winds in Lincoln City, the Siletz Community Health Clinic did just that, bringing together some 60 people with diabetes and their health care workers.

According to Sandra Hahn, RN, substantial research has proved the effectiveness of intensive education. This means more than your regular doctor's visit; it includes actual classes over a period of time. Education has been so effective in the long term in helping people with diabetes control their blood sugar levels and have fewer complications that insurance companies are willing to pay for these classes to be held.

When the local diabetes program first heard about it, however, the only hospitals holding classes were too far away. While program directors were trying to figure out a way to provide for a group of patients to attend a class, someone suggested starting our own class. But how would we organize it? The idea was so new and all the programs were greatly varied. So they decided to ask clinic patients.

One patient pulled Sandra aside and said, “You know, I wish you'd just take care of me for a few days and get me started. Really **show** me how to eat and how I'm supposed to live for the rest of my life.” That's when they decided to combine intensive education with an interactive, hands-on retreat. Participants in the program would be taken care of for three days, with meals provided, education met, and exercise worked into their stay. And the program has been going on, in two steps, ever since.

In May, diabetic Native Americans and their family members sat anxiously at the breakfast table of a large conference room, wondering what insights the next three days would bring. The Path to Wellness, put on by the CTSI Diabetes Grant, has indeed helped many diabetic Native Americans better understand and take care of their life-long condition.

All attending learned that diabetes affects all body systems. “The best defense” anyone can give us, says Dr. Randy Teich, dentist, “is control.”

One difficulty in having diabetes is being careful what you eat.

Sugars are a definite no, carbohydrates turn **into** sugar, alcohol has a high sugar **content**, and not only is this an inconvenience, but a diabetic's life can depend on the food choices they make. Living with diabetes causes greater complication risk factors. For example, the risk for renal disease is six times greater, heart disease goes up 42 percent, and cancer/stroke up 50 percent. Blindness is more likely, blood vessels harden, and you easily get gingivitis.

Attendees were taught things that can be done as precautions to any complications: a healthy diet, exercise, checking blood sugar daily, brushing, flossing, regular dental visits, healthy weight, not smoking, stress management, and controlled blood pressure. A presentation was given on the benefits of exercise and fun, easy examples were given in which everyone present could participate.

Those present listened to a presentation on recognizing trouble symptoms and what to do in case of high or low blood sugar.

Everyone was reminded to have their feet checked annually, go to the dentist once a year, get a dilated eye exam annually, and a micro-albumin test every three months. They discussed many new treatments and daily aids that the diabetic research field is developing. One product was a blood sugar level indicator that is worn like a watch – an improvement over sticking your finger.

One big complication is depression that often accompanies a chronic illness. Angela Clarke, an ICW counselor, stressed that depression is a clinical illness and should not be downplayed or denied. She listed several warning signs of depression and talked with the group about reasons they might be depressed.

One-third of Native Americans with type II diabetes have been diagnosed with clinical depression. In a moderate case, natural remedies such as St. John's Wort and light therapy, combined with heightened social activity, may help counteract the decline.

Smoking and diabetes is one of the worst combinations to which you can



“Smart Cycling” Bicycle Safety Course

Aug. 3, 2001

11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Siletz Tribal Community Center

For kids 8-14 years old

Learn and practice basic aspects of cycling safety, traffic awareness, and have a lot of fun!

Lunch provided!

Smart Cycling Presenters

Cathy Rasmussen, RN, Community Health Director
Miranda Strong, Eugene A/O Community Health Advocate

Additional Health and Safety Presenters

Shannon Chrisman, Tobacco Prevention Coordinator
Norm Counts, Tribal Police Chief

Children must bring their own
bicycle and helmet.

Note: Siletz Tribal youth who do not have helmets should see Maxine Rilatos prior to Aug. 3.

Parents welcome!

Please pre-register your child/children by calling 1-800-648-0449 or 541-444-1030 and asking for Shannon Chrisman at ext. 661 or Alissa Lane at ext. 656



subject yourself. Smoking has an impact on your blood flow and causes poor control, along with delaying medicinal reaction time. Smoking throws off your metabolism, too.

Quitting holds benefits at any age. You should exercise and contact a dietician if you are concerned about weight gain upon stopping. All area offices have “quit-kits” and you can talk to Shannon Chrisman, tobacco prevention coordinator for the Siletz Tribe, for more information.

Among the main points stressed was **control**. So many times, we were reminded that the first and most

important step on the path to wellness is to keep our diabetes under control. If you or someone you know is diabetic, please make sure the affected party lets their employer know their needs, wears a diabetes ID bracelet, and always has a snack with them in case of a crisis.

Rose Bremner, who attended the retreat, is newly diagnosed with diabetes. So it was all new to her and held a lot of learning. She says she was very “impressed ... by the support that people give each other. People who have diabetes and their spouses who don't even have diabetes, they were all very supportive.”