

SEARHC **healthbeat**

Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium
a bi-monthly newsletter from your partner in health

Find it at
www.searhc.org

Looking for healthy recipes using your favorite local foods? You can find them on the Internet at www.searhc.org. Our SEARHC nutritionists have compiled recipes such as Guwakaan dleeyi and Dzisk'w dleeyi - Venison Zucchini bake - for you to serve your friends and family.

How to get there:
On our home page main menu, select "Health tips" and then "Healthy recipes."

For more information: Contact the SEARHC Health Promotion Program at (907) 866-8734.



The doctor will see you now



"As medical technology becomes more and more sophisticated, we are able to evaluate more medical conditions at earlier stages than ever before," Dr. Wright said. "With early diagnosis, we can more effectively plan for a successful treatment." ❖

Flu shots are now available

With the restrictions on influenza vaccine use lifted in January, anyone over six months old may now receive the vaccine. SEARHC healthcare providers are advising patients that there is still time to get a "flu" shot.

"Since the flu season in Alaska extends into March or later, it's not too late to get shots, now that flu vaccine is more widely available," said Mary Therese Thompson, infection control specialist at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital.

Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital pharmacist Traci Gale confirmed that adequate supplies are available for all SEARHC clinics and villages. "We have plenty of vaccine available for SEARHC beneficiaries, and if one of the clinics should run out, we can provide additional vaccine," she said.

According to a report issued January 27 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, influenza has not peaked yet and could continue for several months. Consequently, even getting the flu shot late can offer protection against influenza this season. Those who have been waiting to get their shots are now encouraged to get the vaccine at their local clinic. The CDC continues

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SEARHC patients who visit Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital for an MRI no longer have to dread the procedure, now that SEARHC has installed one of the new generation of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) technology. In addition to performing state-of-the-art imaging in a fraction of the time it took older MRIs, the new MRI is quieter and more open and thus less likely to cause patients to feel claustrophobic and anxious.

"When the patient is more at ease, we capture better images to help the physician make a confident diagnosis," said Jerry Wright, M.D., Chief of Radiology Services.

MRI technology is used to identify abnormalities in the head, spine, chest, abdomen, pelvis and extremities, as well as to examine joints. Unlike other imaging technologies that rely on x-rays, MRI uses a powerful, doughnut-shaped magnet. During an MRI exam, the patient lies inside the magnet's opening while the computer reads signals from the atoms in the patient's body and reconstructs that data into detailed images. Often this type of diagnostic information cannot be acquired with any other medical procedure except surgery.

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HealthBeat is produced every two months by the SEARHC Corporate Communication department for SEARHC beneficiaries. To be added or removed from our mailing list, or to offer comments or questions, please contact the Corporate Communication office at 907-463-4067.

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An important message from the President



Many of you noticed that the December issue of Health Beat did not find its way to your door until mid-January. As a result, our holiday greetings may have seemed oddly late. While the newsletter was produced on time, our Anchorage printer was held up waiting for the right paper stock to arrive from Seattle. When I first learned of this, I thought about the “domino effect.”

In the 1970s, the domino effect was used to explain how – like a line of dominos fall one after the other when the first one is pushed over – one action can affect every action that follows it.

In Southeast Alaska, we live with the domino effect every day. This is especially true in health care. Delivering patients, providers and supplies to their intended destinations in a timely manner can be a real challenge because we need to rely on others – the Alaska Marine Highway, Alaska Airlines, smaller air carriers and hundreds of Lower 48 vendors and suppliers – to help us deliver reliable health care to you and your family.

Most of the time, we are successful. Sometimes we are victims of the domino effect. In any case, please know that we will keep doing our best to provide the highest level of services possible throughout Southeast Alaska.

Ken Brewer



Continued from page 1

to recommend vaccinating high-risk groups.

“High-risk groups are still a priority, but we want to get the word out to people: It is still flu season, and anyone who has not gotten their flu vaccine yet can call and make an appointment to do so,” said Phyllis Hill, Outpatient

Some good advice to help prevent the spread of flu and other viruses:

- When you cough, cover your mouth.
- When you sneeze or blow your nose, use a disposable tissue.
- Throw away tissues immediately and wash your hands.
- Keep tissues available at home, at school and in your car.
- Wash your hands often with soap and warm water for at least 15 seconds.
- Wash hands immediately after contact with a sick person.
- Make sure plenty of soap and clean towels are always available.
- Help young children wash their hands properly.
- If you think you have the flu, do not go to work or school.
- If your child may have the flu, do not send him or her to day care.
- Good advice is to rest and drink plenty of fluids.
- Contact your healthcare provider if you have other long-term health problems.

Department manager at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital. She stressed that the flu vaccine is for influenza, “not the common cold or other viruses that we may call ‘the flu’.”

CDC recommendations on priority groups were modified as the supply situation changed. Priority groups currently are identified as:

- Children ages six to 23 months old
- Adults age 50 to 64
- Adults age 65 and older
- People age two to 64 who suffer from underlying chronic medical conditions
- Pregnant women
- Nursing home and long-term care facility residents
- Children two to 18 on chronic aspirin therapy
- Healthcare workers who deliver direct patient care
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of children under six months old
- Out-of-home caregivers and household contacts of people in high-risk groups

To avoid getting the flu, the usual common-sense precautions should be observed. “Influenza is a viral infection that is spread by contact,” Thompson said. “It is always good to practice good and frequent hand washing.” ❖

Juneau Dental → care shifts to other sites during clinic renovation

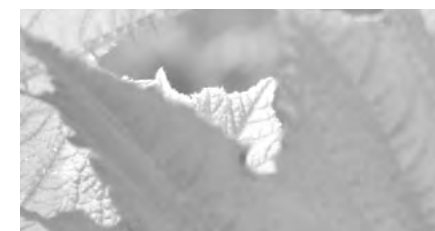
The SEARHC Dental Clinic in Juneau is now seeing scheduled patients on the first floor of the SEARHC Annex Building at 3200 Hospital Drive. Walk-in patients and those with dental emergencies are receiving care at the Front Street Clinic.

The clinic will remain in this temporary location through May, when its staff will move back into its newly renovated and expanded second floor home at 3245 Hospital Drive.

“The state-of-the-art renovation will be twice the size of the old clinic and provide an opportunity to serve nearly twice the patients,” said Matt Christner of facilities management. Improvements include an expansion to 12 chairs with advanced equipment, a new elevator for convenient patient access, more administrative space and a larger patient waiting area.

Coinciding with the dental renovation, new spaces for the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program and the SEARHC Health Promotion department and an expanded Behavioral Health department are underway on the first floor at 3245 Hospital Drive. These projects should be completed in June.

For questions or more information, please call 463-4000. ❖



Patient Tip: Finding non-drug alternatives to chronic pain relief

To help reduce the amount of drugs – especially narcotics – that medical providers prescribe for chronic pain, SEARHC clinics now offer patients several alternative therapies.

These treatments include physical therapy, mental health counseling, osteopathic and massage therapies and even acupressure and acupuncture. Care providers also are getting advice from elder councils on how to tie in traditional healing practices with patient treatment.

“This is very timely,” SEARHC board president Jan Hill said of the additional pain treatment therapies. “Our board is concerned about the problem of prescription drug abuse and is interested in alternative treatments.”

Board member Millie Stevens agrees. “I think it is fantastic that they (SEARHC providers) are using alternatives to medications, which often only treat the symptoms by covering the pain,” she said. “It’s a win-win situation for everyone.”

In addition, to decrease the risk of patient narcotic addiction and diversion (selling or giving medication to others), SEARHC providers are cutting back on the medications – particularly narcotics – that they prescribe.

“We are scaling down on narcotics prescriptions for treatment of pain,” said David Vastola, M.D., Community Health Services medical director, “and we have contracts with patients who are on pain medication. If they violate their pain contracts (by taking the medicine more often than prescribed or diverting), they become ineligible for the narcotic medication.”

“Medications are not always the best or only treatment for pain,” said Brent Long, a physician’s assistant at Alicia Roberts Medical Center (ARMC). He said that care providers at ARMC, as well as other SEARHC clinics, use a multi-disciplinary approach, working with pharmacists, nursing and mental health practitioners to plan a patient’s treatment.

It is an ongoing process, as SEARHC physicians and medical staff continue to seek more effective strategies for managing pain. “Wellness, prevention and alternative methods will continue to be part of our strategic planning process,” Vastola said.

New program will teach diabetes prevention practices

Type 2 diabetes is a serious health concern for Alaska Natives. Southeast Alaska Natives have one of the highest rates -- about 5 percent -- of type 2 diabetes in the state.

“This might not seem that alarming,” said Susan Hoyt, SEARHC Diabetes Prevention Project Coordinator, “but Alaska Natives have the highest rate of increase in the disease when compared to all Natives in the Lower 48, which is a very disturbing statistic.”

Hoyt said that people with diabetes are two-to-four times as likely to have a heart attack than those without the disease, and diabetes is the leading cause of kidney disease, foot and leg amputations and blindness in adults.

There is good news, however. “Diabetes can be delayed and possibly prevented,” Hoyt said. “Three years ago, the Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), a national study that included American Indians, found that lifestyle changes were more effective than medication at delaying type 2 diabetes.”

Study participants, who had been diagnosed with pre-diabetes (higher than normal blood sugar) were especially at risk for the disease. Those who were enrolled in lifestyle change classes, which focused on healthy eating and active living, lowered their risk of diabetes by 58 percent.

To adapt the lessons learned in the DPP to American Indian and Alaska Native communities, the Indian Health Service (IHS) set up a \$27.4 million competitive grant process to fund grants that would focus on diabetes prevention or on the prevention of heart disease in people with diabetes. The SEARHC Diabetes Program was awarded one of 36 diabetes prevention grants last October.

“The IHS is a trendsetter,” Hoyt said. “This is the first time that the practices used in the DPP study will be adapted for use in community settings.”

After an initial, one-year planning phase, the five-year project will provide lifestyle change classes in Juneau and Sitka. Alaska Natives who have pre-diabetes and are interested in reducing their risk of developing type 2 diabetes will be invited to join the program. In addition to the two program sites, wellness activities will be offered quarterly in Hoonah and Yakutat.

Hoyt and her counterpart in Juneau, Rocky Plotnick, hope to apply what worked in the DPP study in Alaska Native communities. For more information, please contact Hoyt at 907-966-8414 or Plotnick at 907-364-4452. ❀



Susan Hoyt,
SEARHC Diabetes Prevention Project Coordinator

*“Diabetes
can be
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possibly
prevented...”*



This time of year shoveling snow is a great way to exercise and burn calories.



91 year old Martha
Nelson of Angoon.

*“By virtue
of doing the
study, people
learn a
lot about
themselves...”*

Angoon residents participate in national wellness project

“Gooooooood morning, Angoon!” This exuberant greeting met Angoon residents listening on their CBs each morning during one week in January. The cheerful voice riding the airwaves belonged to Cheri Hample, EARTH (Education and Research Towards Health) project coordinator. Cheri and two other SEARHC staff spent a total of 10 days in Angoon spread across two visits in December and January to enroll Alaska Natives and American Indians in the long-term health and wellness study.

Each morning, Cheri issued her greeting and invited Native residents to visit the SEARHC clinic to enroll in the study. And, despite uncooperative weather, the people and community of Angoon responded enthusiastically. “The City of Angoon and the Angoon Community Association were very supportive, allowing employees time off from work to complete the study,” Cheri said. “The clinic staff were so helpful, especially Doreen McClusky, the community wellness advocate who helped with recruitment, and the community as a whole was very responsive.”

The survey asks detailed questions about such things as the participant’s eating habits and physical activity. The health screening provides each participant with information about their blood pressure, cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose levels and other helpful information, such as safety concerns and family health history. “By virtue of doing the study, people learn a lot about themselves,” Cheri said. “They receive a four-page health summary before they leave.”

Old-fashioned word of mouth was quite effective. “People who completed the study saw the value of it and spread the word. They wanted their family members and friends to be included,” Cheri said.

Among participants were a 91-year old woman, possibly the oldest person to be recruited for the study in Alaska, and a homebound woman who had contacted the staff herself. Using portable medical equipment and a paper version of the computer survey that participants normally complete on touch-screen computers, the staff was able to enroll the woman by going to her home.

The two visits to Angoon yielded a total of 109 participants out of about 300 eligible residents. Forty-five men were enrolled in the study -- quite an accomplishment, according to staff. “A lot of wives brought in their husbands to have them checked,” said Walleen Whitson, research assistant. “Some came because they didn’t know much about their health and wanted to learn more, and others wanted to help promote good health among future generations of Alaska Natives.”

Besides Angoon, Sitka is the only other Southeast Alaska community currently involved in the study, although negotiations are under way for the study to include Kake. In Sitka, the study has enrolled 183 of 1,200 eligible residents during the past year.

Is a health career in your teen's future?



Few people get to watch the real ER doctors in action, or the operating room staff during surgery, or even a dentist performing a root canal. Southeast Alaska Native high school students can experience these and other opportunities when they participate in the Ethel Lund Village Health Occupations Program (VHOP).

Each year, SEARHC selects 12 students interested in careers the health field to visit Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital to learn about different health careers, educational requirements and pay scales. Positions in these fields usually offer good pay and employee benefits, as well as the satisfaction of helping others.

This year's VHOP session is scheduled for April 25-29. Students who are selected to participate receive assistance to cover travel costs to and from Sitka, housing, meals and some evening entertainment.

"The goal of the program is to expose Native students from rural Southeast communities to different health

careers," said SEARHC tribal recruitment coordinator Roxanne Houston. "Students will 'job shadow' with doctors, dentists, nurses, x-ray technicians and many other health professionals." The experience enables them to evaluate their own strengths and decide which jobs might best suit them.

The deadline for applications is April 4, 2005. Application packets should include five items: application form; letter of recommendation from school superintendent, principal, counselor or teacher; student essay; agreement of conduct (signed by participant and parent); and student profile.

Completed applications may be faxed to 907-966-8527 or mailed to Roxanne Houston at SEARHC, 222 Tongass Drive, Sitka, AK 99835. Because space is limited, interested students should apply early. Applications are available at high school offices, local village corporations and at www.searhc.org. Click on student information and then on VHOP.

Sponsored by SEARHC and funded by a grant from the Elihu Foundation, VHOP stresses hands-on experience and job shadowing as ways to immerse students in the healthcare environment at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital. For more information, contact Roxanne Houston, 907-966-8476, rhouston@searhc.org. ❖

Events

Klukwan & Haines: Klukwan Health Center is scheduling patient health evaluations. Haines Health Center offers the StrongWomen program for middle-aged and older women. Call Pam Sloper, 766-6367 for information. Haines Health Center sponsors yoga at the Chilkat Center Dance Studio, Mondays, 5-6 p.m., and a wellness talking circle support group for women at Haines Public Library every other Thursday, noon-1 p.m. (March 10 and 24; April 7 and 21).

Juneau: WISEWOMAN offers health screenings, discussion, healthy meal and video—"Hawaii Spring Surf & Screen" event, 5 p.m., March 14, Silverbow Back Room Restaurant. For more information, call 463-4045. Juneau Medical Center offers Cancer 101 workshop April 12-13. To register, e-mail susan.suarez@searhc.org or call 966-8459. Sponsored by SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program. StrongWomen program will meet the third week of April at Fitness Essentials, Mondays and Wednesdays. Call Lynda Koski at 463-4040 for details.

Prince of Wales: Ketchikan Theatre Ballet performs March 4 in honor of breast cancer awareness. Call Gwen Hamilton at 755-4946 for details.

Sitka: A 2005 breast cancer overview and an update on screening, diagnosis and treatment, noon - 2 p.m., March 25, SEARHC Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital Litehouse cafeteria conference room. For information about StrongWomen program in Sitka, call Janice, 966-8739, or Elizabeth, 966-8849.

Please contact your local SEARHC clinic for more information.

Veteran Angoon health aide retires

When Jessie Jim began working as a SEARHC community health aide in Angoon in the late 1960s, she worked out of her home and made house calls, carrying all her gear in a little traveling bag. Jessie, who at the time she retired earlier this year, saw patients in the new state-of-the-art Angoon Health Center. She finally decided to hang up the old medical bag after 35 years of service.

Jessie Jim, a SEARHC community health practitioner retired in January. She is one of the last of the original group of Southeast Alaska health aides who helped launch the program in the '60s, notes her supervisor Steve Gage. "Like the others of her time, Jessie came forward more as a volunteer than as someone pursuing a career. The position has changed a lot over the years and these remarkable women demonstrated an endless ability to grow with the job."

Yakutat community health practitioner Barbara Johnson, who is now the last of her generation of health aides still on the job, recalls her experience working with Jessie in Angoon for nearly 20 years. "Jessie and I worked side by side. We didn't have much then, just some bandages, a blood pressure cuff and a



Jessie Jim: One of the last of the "originals"

stethoscope. We spent a lot of time calling the doctors in Sitka and they helped us out. But we had to do it all—we delivered babies and worked as the EMTs. It was a strenuous job and Jessie was a hard worker." Barbara says that what stands out in her mind was Jessie's ability to put patients at ease. "She liked talking to patients. I was always amazed at how she kept on

working even though she had a family to raise and lots of her own struggles to deal with."

Jessie joins an elite corps of veteran Southeast Alaska health aides who have retired over the past dozen years that includes Alicia Roberts (Klawock), Trudy Wolfe (Hoonah), Alma Cook (Hydaburg) and Edna Charley (Kake).

SEARHC turns 30

April 17, will mark SEARHC's 30th year of serving Southeast Alaska Native people. On April 2 in Sitka, SEARHC will hold a tribal leaders' health summit, which will end with a social event at 6 pm in Sitka's Harrigan Centennial Hall. The evening event will feature traditional dancers, guest speakers, refreshments and a special video presentation. Perhaps the highlight of the evening will be the unveiling of "Gumboot Determination," a 220-page history that tells the story of how

the Southeast Alaska Native people not only survived, but overcame epidemics and went on to eventually create a health care system that is appropriate to their needs. The book, which is rich in historic photos, will be on sale that evening. Proceeds from the sale of "Gumboot Determination" will be donated to The SEARHC Foundation, a charitable non-profit organization that bridges the financial gap between SEARHC's resources and the unmet medical needs of Southeast Alaska Natives. ❖