

SEARCHC healthbeat

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

Lifestyle changes help Cliff Johnson come to terms with diabetes



Four years ago, Cliff Johnson thought he was a goner. He thought he was dying.

Johnson was overweight, his body was bloated and even getting up to use the bathroom was painful because of seven infections and an intestinal blockage. Then Johnson was diagnosed with diabetes and that may have saved his life.

"I thought I was going to go. I really was in bad shape," Johnson said. *"I thought I was slowly dying."*

When he was diagnosed with diabetes, Johnson joined a monthly support group hosted by the SEARHC Diabetes Program and volunteer facilitator, Emma Widmark, a retired home economist. Johnson started making changes to his lifestyle, with the support of his wife, Debbie. He also got a lot of help from Dr. Nandi Than, registered nurse Nicole Hill, registered dietitian Tiffany Andres and others involved in the SEARHC Juneau Medical Center's Diabetes Program.

Johnson cut out the sweets, limited his intake of starches and made other dietary changes. He also started walking a lot and exercising at a gym. Johnson, who is 5-foot-7 1/2, has lost 84 pounds over the past four years (from 290 to 206). Johnson said he went from taking three diabetes pills a day to just one. He said Dr. Than even suggested no medication, since the lifestyle changes seem to have his diabetes under control, but Johnson's not sure if he's ready.

"He has such a good outlook," Andres said. *"It shows that attitude can go a long way in helping someone live a healthy life with diabetes. He's really encouraging for a lot of the others in the group."*

Johnson said he couldn't have made the changes without the support of his wife. He said the other members in the diabetes support group and the workers with the SEARHC Diabetes Program were a big help, too.

"There's such a positive attitude here, I like it," Johnson said. *"They kept making me feel good about myself, and because of the positive feedback that made me keep coming back. Lately, I feel like a 35-year-old man. I can do things I didn't do before. I don't feel 66."* ❖

An important message from the President



As many of you know, April 1 marked the first anniversary of SEARHC's decision to make all 14 of its campuses tobacco-free.

April 1 of last year was a historic date for SEARHC, because it showed our commitment to better health care. By asking staff members, patients and visitors not to use tobacco at our facilities, we created an improved place for healing. Now it's a year later and we already can see the positive effects of this tobacco-free policy.

Tobacco use is not healthy, and we can advise everyone to quit smoking or chewing for his or her own good health. But we also need to walk our talk as a health care organization. If we are going to promote healthy preventive lifestyles among our beneficiaries, then that means restricting tobacco use at our facilities.

As always, SEARHC has taken the lead in promoting preventive lifestyles in Southeast Alaska. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium already has announced that it will follow our lead by declaring the Alaska Native Medical Center tobacco-free starting with the Great American Smokeout in November. Other tribal health organizations plan to follow suit.

SEARHC's tobacco-free campuses are a good start toward creating healthier communities.

Ken Brewer

SEARHC celebrates the first year of its tobacco-free campuses



Ethel Lund, SEARHC president emeritus cuts the cake as Naya Bagby patiently waits.

Patients and employees celebrated the first anniversary of SEARHC's tobacco-free campuses with a gathering April 6 in Sitka. SEARHC decided to take all of its health care facilities tobacco-free starting on April 1, 2005.

"Welcome to our tobacco-free campuses, this is plural. All 14 campuses of SEARHC went tobacco-free a year ago," said Ken Brewer, SEARHC president. *"It's important to recognize that we needed to walk our talk. If we wanted to call ourselves a health care organization, if we wanted credibility, then our campuses needed to be tobacco-free."*

"This makes me feel good," said Ethel Lund, SEARHC president emeritus. *"We tried this several years ago. But now the time was right."*

The tobacco-free designation is for all SEARHC buildings and grounds, including the parking lots and roads running through the campuses. Tobacco use is one of the leading causes of cancer and heart disease, so moving smoke off campus helps promote good health.

"Nothing could have made me prouder than when we decided to go tobacco-free," said Jan Hill, SEARHC's board chairman. *"All of us have been impacted by cancer. This was not something we had to debate. When I got back to Haines after we decided to go tobacco-free, several people asked me how SEARHC is going to pull this off. But now there are a lot of people following SEARHC's lead."*

Several of SEARHC's Community Health Services campuses actually went tobacco-free on Oct. 1, 2004, with all of SEARHC's remaining campuses going tobacco-free six months later. The Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium plans to follow SEARHC's lead by making the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage a tobacco-free campus starting in November. ❁

Marine safety tips for the Alaska summer



Summer in Southeast Alaska is the perfect time to get out on the water for a nice boat ride. However, it doesn't take much to change an enjoyable boat ride into a disaster. About 18 to 19 Alaskans die each year in boating accidents, one of the highest boating fatality rates in the nation based on the number of registered boats.

"Most of Alaska's boating accidents are predictable and preventable," SEARHC Community Injury Prevention Coordinator Crystal Duncan said. *"By taking the time to learn some basic safety rules, Alaskans can increase their chances of surviving a boat accident."*

Here are a few safety tips for the Southeast Alaska summer:

- ◆ Make sure everybody on your boat wears a personal flotation device (PFD) that properly fits. All children age 13 and younger are required by state law to wear a PFD.
- ◆ Never overload your boat. Know what the weight capacity is for your boat and make sure the number of passengers and gear doesn't exceed the weight limit. This especially is important in small open skiffs, which frequently capsize when overloaded.
- ◆ Make sure you know how to wear your survival suit, and practice putting it on so you know how to do it in case of an accident.
- ◆ Never go boating if you are under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- ◆ Check the weather prior to leaving and be alert for changing conditions. The National Weather Service Local Marine Forecast phone number is **1-907-747-6011** and the Web site is **<http://www.arh.noaa.gov/>**.
- ◆ Always file a float plan before you go out on the water. Make sure someone knows your destination, the route you plan to take and when you plan to return. Also, make sure they have a description of your boat, know how many people are onboard and have a description of your survival gear.
- ◆ Carry an emergency kit that includes a handheld VHF radio, first aid supplies, fire starter, flares, snacks (including fresh water), bug repellent, sunscreen, a whistle or horn, fire extinguisher, flashlight, toolbox, spare boat parts, etc.
- ◆ Inspect and make sure your boat is in working condition before leaving shore. Make sure your boat is properly ventilated to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.
- ◆ The temperature always is colder over water than land, so make sure you have enough layers of clothing to stay warm.

For more information on boating safety, contact the SEARHC Community Injury Prevention Program at **1-907-966-8866** or check out these Web sites:

- ◆ Alaska Office of Boating Safety - **<http://www.alaskaboatingsafety.org>**
- ◆ Alaska Marine Safety Education Association - **<http://amsea.org>**
- ◆ U.S. Coast Guard Boating Safety Program for Alaska - **<http://www.uscg.mil/d17/d17rbs/d17rbs.htm>** ❖

Please note:

This article replaces the normal section "Patient Tip" for this issue only.



SEARHC Air Medical Service celebrates 10th anniversary



From left to right are SEARHC lead flight medics Eric Van Cise, Claire Reilly and Katie Lewis.

Arranging a medevac was a complicated process a decade ago, with more time being needed for coordinating planes, pilots and medics than for the flight itself.

Things are different now, as the SEARHC Air Medical Service celebrated its 10th anniversary with a small gathering March 28 in Sitka. The service flew 1,578 medevac missions from March 23, 1996, to March 23, 2006, the actual 10th anniversary date.

A twin-engine Piper Navajo Chieftain is leased from Harris Aircraft Services exclusively for flying SEARHC medevac missions. A single-engine deHavilland Beaver on floats is available from Harris to fly missions to villages requiring water landings. The medevac team is based in Sitka, with four lead flight medics and six intermittent escorts who make sure there are at least two people on call from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., the prime times for medevacs. The Sitka staffing means local EMTs and health aides can stay in their own communities in case their rural clinics need them.

“The faster response time gets the patient to the definitive care a lot sooner,” said Mike Motti, SEARHC’s director of emergency medical services and the lead flight medic on the SEARHC Air Medical Service’s first flight, which went to Kake. *“That’s the purpose of a medevac, the need to get the patient to a higher level of care as soon as possible.”*

Besides getting patients to Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital in Sitka or the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, the SEARHC Air Medical Service is known for the Beanie Babies it gives medevacked patients. Katie Lewis, a lead flight medic/EMS instructor for SEARHC and the EMS escort on that first flight, started the practice

when she saw someone give a 65-year-old woman an angel Beanie Baby before her flight. Lewis arranged donations of the toys to pass out to other patients. The vast majority of medevacked patients are adults, but almost all of them are glad to have a Beanie Baby for company.

“I have the best job in Alaska,” Lewis said. *“Half my job is helping people learn how to help people, and the other half of the time I get to help people myself.”*

Greg Raschick is a teacher at Mt. Edgecumbe High School who has been a lead flight medic for all 10 years of the service. Even though he only works part-time for SEARHC, he was honored for having flown more medevac missions (590) than any other medic.

“Most of the stuff has been pretty routine. What’s been the most notable is the scenery and the people I get to meet, and to see the different communities,” Raschick said. *“I’ve been able to see the evolution of safety, with CAPSTONE and better navigation. It used to be there was no organized system for medevacs, and this provides a system for consistent delivery of care to the patient.”* ❖

NOTICE

In response to the federal law that pertains to the protection of patient health information, SEARHC developed a Notice of Privacy Practices. This Notice describes how medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. SEARHC staff began distributing this Notice in April 2003. Each patient was given this Notice on their first visit to any SEARHC facility since April 13, 2003. This Notice is available from any SEARHC facility, on our website (www.searhc.org) or by calling the Privacy Officer at 364-4466.

Around the Consortium

Klawock/Haines

The Alicia Roberts Medical Center in Klawock and the Haines Health Center each will be undergoing an accreditation survey May 8-11 by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care, Inc. (AAHC). This is the first accreditation survey for the two SEARHC clinics, although an AAHC reviewer performed a consultative or "mock" survey of Alicia Roberts in October so clinic workers could learn about the process.

Haines/Klukwan/Craig

SEARHC WISEWOMAN and health promotion staff members have already started planting for the community gardens. The three community gardens enable local residents to grow fresh vegetables for healthy eating. For more information on the Haines and Klukwan gardens, contact Jennifer Potratz of WISEWOMAN at 766-6366 or Mandy Ramsey of health promotion at 766-6317. In Craig, contact June May of health promotion at 755-4959.

Kake

The SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program will be taking the mobile mammography van to Kake on April 27 to May 1, Angoon on May 5-9, Haines on May 16-26 and Yakutat on June 14-19. There also will be late summer-early fall visits to Hoonah, Haines and Klawock, with a schedule released in July. The SEARHC Breast and Cervical Health Program provides uninsured, underinsured and income-eligible Southeast Alaska women, ages 18-64, with free annual clinical breast exams and women ages 40-64 with yearly mammograms. To schedule an appointment, contact your local clinic. For information, contact Roz DeRensis at 1-888-388-8782.

Sitka

In May, Tlingit master carver Wayne Price of Haines begins carving the Project Kootéeyaa wellbriety totem pole at SEARHC's Sitka campus. The Project Kootéeyaa's mission is to promote and demonstrate the natural partnership between health and Alaska cultures through the embodiment of wellness, community collaboration and traditional values. SEARHC expects to raise the pole this fall on the grounds of its substance abuse treatment programs in Sitka. For information, contact Project Kootéeyaa chairwoman Roberta Kitka at 966-8603.

The Sitka Diabetes and Lifestyle Balance programs will be hosting a six-week series of Saturday walks from May 6 to June 10 as the national America on the Move program. The walks are open to people on SEARHC's diabetes registry, those taking part in the Lifestyle Balance program for pre-diabetes patients and their family members. The walks start at 10:30 a.m. each Saturday, and transportation is available at 10 a.m. at the Lifestyle Balance program office on walk days. Call the office for a schedule of walk locations. For information, contact SEARHC diabetes grant coordinator Toby Brooks at 966-8915.

Consortium-wide

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One of SEARHC's first employees passes on



Ida T. James, a longtime nursing assistant for SEARHC, died March 30, 2006, in Juneau at the age of 91.

Ida was born June 12, 1914, on the Navajo reservation in Cove, Ariz. She trained at St. John's Hospital in Santa Monica, Calif. In 1946 she interviewed with the BIA for a job in Alaska and that started her 48-year career as a nursing assistant. She moved to Juneau in 1951 to work at the public health hospital's TB ward at night. Her tenure at the Juneau Native Clinic began in 1964, back when the clinic was located at St. Ann's Hospital, and continued after the clinic became the SEARHC Juneau Medical Center. Ida retired in 1995 at the age of 81.

Ida's claim to fame was that her husband, Fenton D. James, was the first employee hired by SEARHC. But Ida also was one of the first employees hired by SEARHC and she was the first nursing assistant hired.

She is survived by her husband, who lives in Juneau; a sister, Mable Williams of Sitka; two brothers, Danny (Ann) Miller of Albuquerque, N.M., and Frankie Miller of Arizona; two stepdaughters, Gloria (James) Jack of Juneau and Carolyn (Anthony) McIntyre of Sitka; five grandchildren, Kenneth and Renee Southerland, Mark (Alia) Granda of Juneau, George John and Delmer McIntyre of Sitka; seven great-grandchildren; and numerous nephews and nieces in Juneau, Sitka and Albuquerque. ❀



Find it at www.searhc.org

SEARHC five-year strategic plan

Want to know where your tribal health consortium is headed and how it plans to get there? Then check out www.searhc.org, for a link to the SEARHC Five-Year Strategic Plan 2006-2010.

This plan contains many of the ideas and concerns tribal members shared at the Southeast Caucus of the 2005 Tribal Health Summit. The plan lists 17 main strategic goals for the consortium. It also looks at the health care services provided at each of the SEARHC facilities and the projected health needs for each community.

Go to our home page and look for the strategic plan link under the **“Hot Topics”** section. That will open an introduction page, and the complete plan can be seen by clicking on **“Part 1 – SEARHC Strategic Plan”** and **“Part 2 – SEARHC Community Profiles.”**

HealthBeat is produced every two months by the SEARHC Corporate Communications department. To be added or removed from our mailing list, or to offer comments or questions, please contact the Corporate Communications office at 907-463-6666.

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