

Federal Inmates May Help Reduce Health Care Costs

Barbara Gray, M.S., R.D., L.D.
Florida Department of Health
Arthritis Prevention and Education Program

Issue:

- Research suggests that inmates that are released from prison with untreated conditions, including chronic diseases may become a serious financial burden on community health systems.
- 57% of state female inmates and 57% of federal female inmates
 - Report having a current medical problem
 - Most commonly reported are arthritis, asthma, and hypertension
- 75% of the cost of health conditions in the US are associated with attributed to chronic diseases.

Intervention:

- Federal Correctional Institution
 - Tallahassee, FL
 - Female prison
- The Arthritis Toolkit
 - May 2009
 - Two at \$50
 - One English and one Spanish
 - Used in the library and recreation area
- "Because inmates are literally a "captive" audience, it is vastly more efficient and effective to screen and treat them while they are incarcerated than it is to conduct extensive outreach in local communities...."

Impact:

- June-December 2009
 - 200 check-outs for toolkits
 - Currently, do not know how many participants this is.
- Opened the door for new discussion about more toolkits and CDSMP.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

- Check-out verses participant reach
- Question and find out each prison's process for book usage before distributing toolkits.
- If the prison does not have a check-out system that currently easily counts participants work with them to develop a similar process or data collection tool.
- Federal prisons are divided into regions throughout the nation.
- Each federal prison has their own system for book usage.
- Unfamiliar system

Federal Inmates May Help Reduce Health Care Costs

Issue:

In a study titled *The Health Status of Soon-to-be-Released Inmates*, conducted by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), National Institute of Justice, it was concluded that “inmates who are released with untreated conditions [including chronic diseases] may become a serious financial burden on community health care systems.” Chronic diseases are the most common and costly health conditions in the United States with “more than 75% of health care costs”¹ being attributed to them. Chronic diseases are conditions that are ongoing or long-lasting and are rarely cured completely. Arthritis is one of many chronic diseases. According to the DOJ, Bureau of Justice Statistics “more than half of female inmates in state (57%) and federal (52%) prisons reported having a current medical problem,” and “arthritis, asthma, and hypertension were the most commonly reported medical problems among female inmates.”²

Intervention:

Stanford University’s Patient Education Research Center created The Arthritis Toolkit to help individuals manage the physical and emotional challenges that arise from having arthritis. The toolkit provides participants with the skills needed to become a good self-manager, which is essential to adopting a healthy lifestyle and preventing other chronic diseases. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has researched and proven that this self-study program is effective with helping individuals manage the more than 100 different forms of arthritis and improving participants’ quality of life. This pre-packaged toolkit includes: *The Arthritis Helpbook, Sixth Edition* by Kate Lorig and James Fries, information sheets, two exercise CD’s, one relaxation CD, and an illustrated exercise guide.

“Because inmates are literally a “captive” audience, it is vastly more efficient and effective to screen and treat them while they are incarcerated than it is to conduct extensive outreach in local communities designed to encourage at-risk individuals to go to a clinic for testing and treatment.”³ The Arthritis Toolkit was designed as an individual mail-delivered program; however to provide this resource more cost effectively, the Florida Department of Health, Arthritis Prevention and Education Program (Arthritis Program) took advantage of this captive audience and provided the Federal Correctional Institution in Tallahassee, Leon County, Florida with two 50-dollar toolkits for their library. In May 2009, one English and one Spanish toolkit were shipped to the facility’s library so female inmates would be able to reference the material and learn how to better manage their arthritis.

Impact:

In only two months, The Arthritis Toolkits were checked-out a total of 135 times (75 times for English and 60 times for Spanish). The Arthritis Program was overjoyed to learn that the 100-dollar investment affected such a large portion of the female inmate population. Although Stanford University has yet to conduct a study to determine the health outcomes of The Arthritis Toolkit in correctional facilities, the Arthritis Program staff is hopeful that the self-management skills learned by these federal inmates will help reduce the financial burden on their community, and the nation, when they are released.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Arthritis Program, <<http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/index.htm>>, 2009.

² U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics, <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/mpp.pdf>>, 2004.

³ National Commission on Correctional Health Care, *The Health Status of Soon-to-be-Released Inmates*, <http://secure.ncchc.org/pubs/pubs_stbr.html>, 2002.