
Senior Healthcare Tools for Consumers and Professionals

Jennifer Maybin

“Baby boomers,” that group of Americans born between 1946 and 1964, will begin turning age 65 in 2011, just 3 short years away. Their aging has dramatically changed the demographics of our population—in fact by 2030, about 71.5 million Americans will be aged 65 or older, compared with just 37 million in 2006.^{1,2}

This group is better educated (in 2007, 76% had high school diplomas and 19% had a bachelor’s degree or higher), and their net worth has increased almost 80% over the last 20 years.¹ Yet despite living longer, the life expectancy for Americans aged 65+ is lower than that of many other industrialized nations. For instance, the life expectancy of Japanese women aged 65 and older is 3.2 years longer than that of American women 65 and older. Chronic conditions are prevalent: arthritis affects 54% of women older than 65 and 43% of men; heart disease, 37% of men and 26% of women; and hypertension, 54% of women and 52% of men.¹

Lack of Specialized Professionals

Caring for these elders often falls to family physicians who may or may not be specially trained in geriatric medicine. A new Zogby International poll, the Senior Health Index, commissioned by the American System for Advancing Senior Health (ASASH™), shows that 7 out of 8 baby boomers believe it’s important to be cared for by a physician with specialized training in geriatric medicine, but most say they cannot find such a doctor.³ According to the Senior Health Index, 1 in 3 respondents say they need more help with their healthcare decisions, and 71% want to be able to find more information about their own

healthcare. Half of the survey respondents believe they are in the best position to help improve the quality of their own health.³

In fact, a new study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce*, shows that quality care for older Americans may be difficult to obtain for several reasons. There are not enough specially trained physicians or other healthcare providers in geriatric medicine. Physicians who treat senior citizens rely on Medicare reimbursement for most of their pay. Yet Medicare reimburses at low rates and emphasizes treatment of short-term health problems rather than management of chronic conditions and preventive measures.²

Need for Seniors to Take Charge of Own Health

The IOM report calls for increased specialty training in geriatric medicine for healthcare workers who treat seniors. At the same time, the report notes that “Older adults and their friends and family have a large role to play. Patients can re-

tain their independence by learning how to manage their health, particularly chronic diseases. Training programs should be set up to help family members, friends, and others get the knowledge and skills they need to provide care to their loved ones and to alleviate the stress they may feel from providing this care.”²

To help fill the growing need for health information and healthcare services for these aging boomers, Pinnacle Health Communications, HealthCom Media (publisher of *Medicare Patient Management*, *Menopause Management*, *Assisted Living Consult*, and *American Nurse Today*), and the University of Sciences in Philadelphia have joined together to develop a collaborative venture—an integrated multimedia system of tools—to aid healthcare providers, payers, senior citizens, caregivers, and others seeking targeted information about senior health. That venture, ASASH™, aims to put senior health at the forefront of the nation’s consciousness.

Resources for Consumers and Professionals

ASASH is a system that brings together government, employers, managed care organizations, providers, advocates, manufacturers, and seniors to provide a *single source* for senior patients and clinicians to access care support. The system is organized under an umbrella organization, the Alliance for Advancing Senior Health, which seeks out organizations that have common goals—increasing the visibility of senior health issues and enhancing the public health information infra-

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structure designed for and available to America’s seniors. Working together, the alliance and ASASH will identify and bring the most relevant, up-to-date health information to seniors and those professionals and family who care for them, so that these patients may realize improved health outcomes. Information and tools for consumers and professionals are available—with synergies between the two. Included are:

- For consumers: *NueLife*, a consumer journal; NueLife.com, a healthcare Web site (www.NueLife.com) for seniors; and NueLife on location, a series of live “Lunch and Learn” programs designed to engage seniors about important health issues
- For professionals: NueLifePro.com, a Web site for healthcare providers (<http://www.NueLifePro.com/>); the journals *Medicare Patient Management* and *Assisted Living Consult*; and the Advancing Senior Health (ASH) Confer-

ence, a pioneering, senior-specific, medical education event in which health professionals from all disciplines and specialties will hear from some of the industry’s top thought leaders, learn about innovative methods of assessment and care, collaborate on ways to maximize positive outcomes for the expanding senior patient population, and earn continuing education credits.

In case you are wondering about the name, “NueLife,” which serves the 55 and older population, it is derived from Greek numerals, in which Nu = 50 and e = 5.

In future issues of *Medicare Patient Management*, we will discuss these resources and how you can use the professional tools for your own training and encourage your patients to use the consumer tools to boost their own health. In the meantime, take a look at what the consumer site has to offer and explore the tools and services provided on NueLifePro.com. Also, sign up now for the Advancing Senior Health (ASH) Conference, October 1-2, 2008, in Philadelphia (ash-conference.com). MPM

Jennifer Maybin is a freelance healthcare writer in Branchburg, NJ.

References

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