

MEDICAL BRIEFS

Healthy hearts

"Good" and "bad" cholesterol, heredity, stress, diet, exercise—how do these factors impact your heart?

St. Mary Mercy Hospital in Livonia will offer several classes related to cardiovascular health from Sept. 20 to Nov. 29 to clarify the overabundance of heart health information available to consumers. The first class, "Take it to Heart," held from 7-9 p.m. in West Addition A, will assist in understanding and identifying personal risk factors for developing heart disease.

There is a fee. Participants can pre-register by contacting the Community Outreach Department at (734) 655-8940 or 1-800-494-1650 (out-of-area callers).

Volunteers needed

The American Cancer Society is looking for individuals interested in the fight against breast cancer to volunteer for the fourth annual "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk" Saturday, Oct. 13, at Detroit's Belle Isle Park. A variety of volunteer opportunities are available. Call 1-800-ACS-2345.

Prescription program

Starting Oct. 1, 2001, the Elder Prescription Insurance Coverage will take effect. As of Sept. 20, 2001, the Michigan Emergency Pharmaceutical Program for Seniors will no longer exist.

The EPIC is a new state program that will provide a 12-month prescription benefit for eligible and enrolled low-income seniors, allowing more complete coverage than was previously available. The initial focus of EPIC will be on current MEPPS recipients and current Senior Prescription Drug Tax Credit Beneficiaries. However, other qualified older adults will be able to apply for assistance once these two priority groups have completed enrollment.

EPIC applications currently are being mailed out to MEPPS clients who have participated in MEPPS within the last 12 months, followed by Senior Prescription Drug Tax Credit Beneficiaries. Assistance is available to answer questions and fill out applications by appointment at the City of Westland's Friendship Center.

Open enrollment for all other potential participants will begin Jan. 1, 2002. Call (734) 722-7632.

Breast Health Expo

Saint Joseph Mercy Health System will present its annual Breast Health Expo 5:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 3, at the Education Center at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, 5301 East Huron River Drive, Ypsilanti.

A special presentation by Dr. Janet Ousch, a full professor of surgery and epidemiology at Michigan State University who has spoken extensively on breast cancer throughout the country, will focus on medical education and public policy. She will discuss common concerns and misconceptions.

■ The need for screening when there is no family history of breast cancer.

■ Why women should wait until age 40 for initial screening.

■ Differences between breast preservation treatment and mastectomies.

■ The need for mammograms for women over the age of 70.

■ Why the machine must squeeze so hard during mammograms.

The SJMHS Breast Health Expo will also include health exhibits, door prizes and light refreshments. Admission is free but reservations are required. Call the Saint Joseph Mercy HealthLine at (800) 321-2211.

We want your health news

There are several ways you can reach the Observer Health & Fitness staff. The Sunday section provides numerous venues for you to offer newsworthy information including Medical Databook (upcoming calendar events), Medical Newsmakers (appointment/view hours in the medical field), and Medical Briefs (medical advances, short news items from hospitals, physicians, companies). We also welcome newsworthy ideas for health and fitness related stories. To submit an item to our newspaper you can call, write, fax or e-mail us.

■ CALL US:

(734) 953-2128

■ WRITE US:

Observer & Eclectic Newspapers
(Specify Databook, Newsmakers or Briefs)
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THE AFTERMATH OF DISASTER

BY RENEE SKOGLUND

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Our national psyche has been shaken to the core by Tuesday morning's terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center Towers in New York City and damaged the Pentagon in Arlington, Va.

Our homes have been invaded with 24-hour, Technicolor coverage of the tragedy. We feel horrified, angry, vulnerable and numb with disbelief.

A few of us will suffer some form of psychological stress, but most of us will recover and discover a new resolve.

"I'm not the way I thought I would be," said Connie Graye, 49, of Plymouth, who works in the family-owned Graye's Greenhouse. "I see the damage, but I see most of New York City still standing. I see the Pentagon and know there has been loss of lives, but I see life still going on. I see everything different now. I look at my garden and it looks so beautiful."

The term Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is a familiar one. We associate it with survivors of military conflict, natural disasters, violent crime and, now, terrorist attacks. It's a definite psychotic condition resulting from personally experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening encounter.

But can a nation suffer from a collective form of post-traumatic stress?

In a clinical sense, experts say, not really. As a short-term emotional response? Perhaps.

"I think that you can certainly have a lot more exposure to disturbing imagery than before with this 24-hour coverage," said Dr. John Campbell, medical director of Kingswood Hospital, Henry Ford Health System. "I'm still sorting this out in my head."

Constant replay of the planes slicing through buildings and people jumping from windows could either build up a resistance to the imagery or "open up all kinds of new anxieties," said Campbell, a former member of the U.S. Air Force's Rapid Response Team, which provides stress management to disaster survivors.

Unresolved psychological issues may rise to surface. "Anybody who has had some kind of traumatic loss and never had closure on it can have that loss reactivated, the sense of doom and grief," said Campbell.

And for those people with anxiety, depression, or other mental illnesses, Tuesday's events could result in serious consequences, he added. "We had some people admitted to our hospital because of this. They've struggled with paranoia, and their illness relapsed."

Severity

The greater the perceived life threat, and the greater the sensory exposure—the distressing sights, smells, sounds—or the extent of personal injury, the more likely post-traumatic stress will



Dr. John Campbell, medical director Kingswood Hospital, Henry Ford Health System.

■ 'In addition to our vulnerability we have resilience. We go through a time when we recover, learn and improve upon ourselves.'

— Dr. Israel Liberzon

Department of Psychiatry,
University of Michigan Health System

surface.

The National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder terms this "dose response."

Also, the type and intensity of each survivor's reaction to the same tragedy will vary greatly. Factors contributing to a predisposition to PTSD include biology, genetics, mental factors and previous trauma. Long-term stressors compounding PTSD include marital and family discord, medical illness, or chronic health problems.

Victims aren't the only ones at risk. Rescue workers experience direct or indirect traumatization, and victim's families often suffer "vicarious" traumatization, reliving again and again the suffering of their loved ones while enduring their own loss.

Campbell, who spent two weeks on the site of the Oklahoma City federal building following the April 19, 1995 bombing, said everybody has a certain threshold that can be exceeded by what they see at a disaster scene. Rescuers are involved in prolonged recovery efforts that often require extricating bodies in pieces.

"It's beyond the bubble of normality, outside the envelope of our comfort zone," he said.

However, the human spirit is resilient. Of the approximately 17 million people living in North America who are exposed annually to trauma and disaster, only 25 percent may suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, said Dr. Israel Liberzon, Department of Psychiatry, University of Michigan Health System.

The continuum for those who may suffer from PTSD is quite wide: 1-3 percent for automobile accident victims and 40-60 percent for victims of catastrophes such as the atomic blasts and concentration camp experiences of World War II, Liberzon said. Those survivors suffered years of "continuous trauma with no support," he added.

"The vast majority of those exposed to traumatic events will recover. Even those people who develop PTSD will recover independently within the first year," he said.

Normal

The anger, sadness, emotional malaise and desire for revenge many Americans are experiencing are not primers for PTSD.

"I think it's a normal response and not a disorder," said Liberzon. "We should respond to horrific events. We have to have a response to change our behaviors. Our emotional response is not a by-product of certain behaviors but a predisposition to particular actions."

Those actions will lead us to "seek justice, seek solutions," he added.

Like Campbell, Liberzon believes the round-the-clock, often repetitive media coverage could negatively impact susceptible people. "People who already have problems could be affected in a bad way because it is continuously stimulating," he said.

Liberzon takes issue with the "illness" statements used by some news commentators—"Our lives will never be the same again" and "Our country will never be without fear anymore."

Let the healing begin

"The Oklahoma City bombing was just a mini version of what happened Tuesday," said Dr. John Campbell, medical director of Kingswood Hospital, Henry Ford Health System.

"There's a difference. They caught the perpetrator shortly afterwards. In this case, the mastermind is on the other side of the world planning another attack. There's a lot more anger. The fear went away when Timothy McVeigh was arrested."

Americans will not find an antidote to their fear and anger by drinking alcohol and "watching CNN all day," said Campbell. Rather, they must share their resolve to bring the perpetrators to justice, acknowledge those killed or harmed by participating in a memorial service, and "hug their kids and smell the roses."

For some, feelings of anger and anxiety may linger or get worse over time. Dr. Israel Liberzon, a post-trauma expert with the Department of Psychiatry, University of Michigan Health System, recommends seeking professional help if the following symptoms persist:

- Excessive fear
- Difficulty in controlling emotions
- Sleep disturbances
- Outbursts of anger
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Intrusive memories

Age is not a factor in handling post-traumatic stress. "Children are more susceptible to the reaction of their parents than images they see on television," said Liberzon. "Children can handle situations and endure a lot. It is a matter of security provided by the immediate caregivers."

"First of all, they simply are not true," he said. "We've never lived without fear, and we will live with more fear ... The media exaggerates the impact."

"In addition to our vulnerability, we also have resilience," he added. "We go through a time when we recover, learn and improve upon ourselves. It could become a growth experience, giving us a sense of belonging and support."

The future

Television sets in every classroom at Canton High School continuously played out Tuesday's attack. Katherine Keim, 16, of Canton and most of her fellow students couldn't believe what they were seeing.

"People said it seemed like something from a movie. No one showed any horrible emotions about it," said Keim, a senior. "What scared me was everybody else's reaction. They didn't seem to realize why it happened."

It bothered her that some students talked about retaliation without understanding the consequences. The most intelligent conversations about the terrorist attacks occurred in her humanities class on Thursday, she said. "Our teacher said on the whole you don't judge Christianity by the Ku Klux Klan and you don't judge Islam by the actions of these terrorists."

Keim hopes Tuesday's events will change students' thinking. "I think it's a horrible thing, but maybe it's a wake-up call that we're not invincible. Teenagers think they're invincible to everything."

Barb Lehmann, a Canton guidance counselor, believes the students' reactions were quite normal. Other than the Oklahoma City bombing, few of them had a reference point for assimilating the attacks. Yet, they seemed to handle the situation without undue stress.

"I thought they were very much the same kids,

Please see STRIDES, D6