

Rx Briefs

■ Oakwood reunion

The Halloween fun starts early this year with Oakwood Hospital & Medical Center's Dearborn's 19th annual Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Reunion & Halloween Party 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 27.

All past patients of the Oakwood NICU are invited to dress in their Halloween best and bring their parents for a reunion with other NICU "graduates," their families and Oakwood NICU staff. The party will feature games, prizes and snacks. The festivities will take place in the hospital's Atrium.

Oakwood's 30-bed NICU provides intensive, specialized care for premature or ill newborns. Last year, over 800 guests attended the party.

"It's really a big event for us and the community," said Dr. Derek Bal, director of Oakwood's Neonatology Department. "It gives the staff an opportunity to touch base with patients and see them growing up and living happy, healthy lives, and it gives the families a chance to visit the people who cared for their babies here at Oakwood."

Guests should RSVP by calling (313) 593-8750 by Oct. 13.

■ Couples Massage

Want to give your honey a sweet and soothing Sweetest Day gift? Why not a massage for the both of you.

Bolton Center for Health Improvement offers "Massage for Couples" by appointment. In this class, a couple learns techniques to help relieve stress, tension, sore muscles, headaches, backaches and more. Massage doesn't just feel good; it also provides many physical and psychological benefits.

The center is at 39750 Grand River Ave., between Haggerty and Meadowbrook, in Novi. The cost of the class is \$100 for a 2-hour session. Call (248) 477-6100.

■ Arthritis course

The Michigan Chapter of the Arthritis Foundation, Summit on the Park and the Canton Senior Center will sponsor the Arthritis Self-Help Course, a three-week self-management course designed to give people with arthritis the skills they need to manage their arthritis care. The course will be offered 13 p.m. Mondays, Oct. 14, 21, and 28, at Summit on the Park, 46000 Summit Place Drive (off Canton Center Road), Canton.

The course has proven to be an effective way for people with arthritis to educate and encourage each other. It is designed to complement, not replace, professional health care services.

The cost is \$20 (and \$5 for a companion) and includes a copy of 350-page *The Arthritis Handbook* to register, call (734) 394-5385.

■ Assisted Living

The Healthcare Association of Michigan has released the first-ever *Consumer Guide to Michigan Assisted Living Communities*, a 200-page book that contains information about assisted living options in Michigan. The guide contains listings of all licensed communities with 18 or more units serving seniors, as well as several communities that do not require licensure, along with the various services they provide.

To order, contact Michigan Center for Assisted Living, P.O. Box 80050, Lansing, MI 48908-0050. An online version is available through the Healthcare Association of Michigan's Web site, www.hcam.org.



PHOTOS BY ELIZABETH CAMPBELL / OBSERVER

Renee Palmer, moderator of Women For Sobriety.

A journey to recovery

Women for Sobriety offers hope and healing

BY RENÉE SNOGLUND
STAFF WRITER

They're a group of just four women who meet every Wednesday evening in a small conference room off the cafeteria in Providence Hospital in Southfield. Sometimes there are a "few more who cycle in and out," said group leader Renee Palmer of Southfield.

However, numbers don't matter. Motivation does. These women come together to celebrate sobriety, stay sober and help those who are struggling. They belong to a fledgling support group of Women for Sobriety, a national organization founded in 1976 for women who are addicted to, or who abuse, alcohol and other substances.

"I knew I had to do something for my recovery, and I just wasn't happy with Alcoholics Anonymous," said Renee, who had no reservations about having her last name used or her picture taken. "So I decided to start my own group."

Renee, 36, the mother of two boys, ages 10 years and 10 months, has been sober for three years. About her youngest son, she says: "He was the product of my recovery. He was my gift."

Mary, 42, and Beth, 45, who do not want their last names used, also are present that evening. The others, they say, have been scared off by the thought of a reporter and a photographer being at one of their meetings. "Scared" may be the wrong word; most likely, the absent women

were simply not ready to share their story with the world.

That's OK. The philosophy of Women for Sobriety is all about looking ahead, not remaining in the past.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Renee and Mary, who has been sober 13 years, initially tried Alcoholics Anonymous. They didn't feel comfortable with AA's emphasis on humility and conformity. Such tenets may work well for more aggressive males, but for women already suffering from low self-esteem, they can be a deterrent to personal growth.

"AA was too large," said Renee. "It doesn't give women everything they need when they're starting off in recovery, and there is not a whole lot of focus on self-esteem and confidence."

"You want to get past that humility," she added. "AA keeps you remembering all the bad things. It's like a pile of lobsters. One tries to get out, but the others keep pulling it back in. If you decided to strike out and do something new, you got a lot of censorship."

The dynamics of alcohol abuse and addiction are different between men and women, said Mary. "Men are more arrogant, and women tend to have had their self-esteem knocked out of them."

Handling the woman alcoholic or abuser calls for a different approach.

Instead of AA's belief that humility keeps an alcoholic sober, Women for

Sobriety believes that women have enough humility to last a lifetime. Emotional growth for women, says WFS founder Jean Kirkpatrick in much of her literature, comes from putting the past behind and believing your drinking history does not have to be constantly told and retold.

'I knew I had to do something for my recovery, and I just wasn't happy with Alcoholics Anonymous. So I decided to start my own group.'

Renee Palmer
Group leader

Renee, Mary and Beth like the intimacy of the WFS meetings and the fact that the moderator has been trained to keep discussions focused and mitigate disputes. In AA, the moderator is usually the person with the most sobriety.

Beth, a professional woman from Birmingham, has been sober for four months. She attended six meetings before going on vacation and is getting back on schedule. She is not sure if her four glasses of wine a night, every night, qualifies her as an alcoholic. Her husband is not sure if she needs to attend WFS meetings.

But Beth is comfortable coming. She's attracted by the positively stressed by WFS.

"I just like the chance to talk and hear people's stories," she said. "At AA, I never had any bad stories to offer. I never blacked out and had sex with 15 people."

THE PAST

Renee had her first drink at 13 when her brother took a beer at a family Christmas party and passed it around to his siblings. But the real problems came later.

"I didn't see problems with my drinking until my late 20s.... When I woke up and couldn't remember the night before.... I saw all the bottles and said, 'Hey, maybe I do have a problem,'" she said.

However, her epiphany came when her husband asked her to leave. Shortly afterwards, she was arrested for drunk driving. Her twin sister left her in jail overnight.

"She told me to get sober and stay sober. That was the beginning," said Renee, who underwent intensive outpatient therapy for four months followed by five months of after-care.

Mary began drinking in her late teens when the drinking age was 18. She liked going to bars. "It was a big social time for me," she said.

Like Renee, Mary had experienced abuse in her life.

"I think I was drinking to get away from an abusive family and the pressures of going out in the world," she said.

Also, Mary worked in the comput-

PLEASE SEE SOBRIETY, C6

Women alcoholics often suffer more than men

BY RENÉE SNOGLUND
STAFF WRITER

Nearly one-third of the 15.1 million alcohol-abusing or alcohol-dependent individuals in the United States are women, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. On the whole, women who drink consume less alcohol and have fewer alcohol-related problems and dependence symptoms than men.

But the news is not good among the heaviest drinkers: Women equal or surpass men in the number of problems that result from their drinking.

"Studies of women alcoholics in treatment suggest that they often experience greater physiological impairment earlier in their drinking careers, despite having consumed less alcohol than men," says the NIAAA.

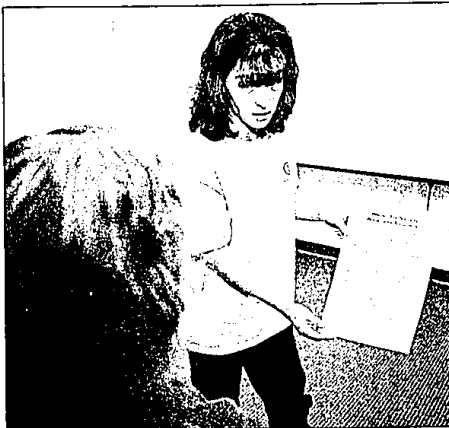
Psychologically, "addiction is far more complicated for women than addiction in men because of the

interplay of other factors, such as depression or abuse," said Dr. Phil O'Dwyer, director of the Center for Counseling, Garden City Hospital.

Physically, women become intoxicated sooner than men. Because women have less body water than men - and since alcohol diffuses uniformly into all body water - women achieve higher levels of blood alcohol after drinking male-equivalent amounts of alcohol.

Women also have diminished activity of alcohol dehydrogenase (the primary enzyme involved in the metabolism of alcohol) in the stomach. Men tend to have more. The increased activity of alcohol dehydrogenase in men acts as a "first-pass metabolism," decreasing the availability of alcohol to the system. Studies cited by the NIAAA state that, in alcoholic women, this first-pass metabolism was virtually nonexistent.

PLEASE SEE ALCOHOLICS, C6



Women For Sobriety moderator Renee Palmer, goes over the basic beliefs of the group with a member.