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Health
FITNESS ■ MEDICINE

Rx briefs

Grief course

Madonna University's College of Nursing and Health, in conjunction with the College of Continuing and Professional Studies, will offer the course "Assisting Families With Grief" 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, Nov. 15, in Room D-118 in the DiPonio Building on campus. The course is targeted primarily for parish nurses.

Led by certified grief therapist Dr. Jack LoCicero, associate professor, hospice education, the workshop will examine gender and developmental differences in response to the different aspects of family intervention without suffering compassion fatigue.

Participants may earn up to 6.6 nursing contact hours. Madonna University is an approved provider of continuing education in nursing by the Michigan Nurses Association. The MNA is accredited as an approver of continuing education by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.

Advanced registration is preferred. The cost of the workshop is $65 and includes course materials and continental breakfast. For registration information, call (734) 432-5731 or fax (734) 432-5364.

Flu shots

Roll up your sleeves. It's not too late to inoculate yourself against the flu season. Meijer Pharmacy will be offering flu shots at several Meijer locations:

- Eight Mile and Haggerty, Northville - 3-7 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 12. Call (248) 349-2707.
- Ford Road and Canton Center, Canton - 4-8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 13. Call (734) 981-0844.
- Warren Road and Newburgh, Westland - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday, Nov. 18. Call (734) 728-3550.

Flu shots are $17; pneumonia shorts are $25. There's no charge for people with Medicare, Part B.

Depression

Madonna University in Livonia is offering a free session titled "Coping With the Holiday Blues" 6-8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 21, in Room 1000 on campus.

"While the holiday season is joyous for many, it can also bring stress and difficult emotions to many people," said Dr. Robert Cohen, associate professor, psychology, and clinical director of Madonna University's Psychological Services Clinic. Cohen, a clinical psychologist in practice, will present a brief talk about what makes the holidays depressing for some, how individuals can cope with difficult feelings, and how to obtain professional help if necessary.

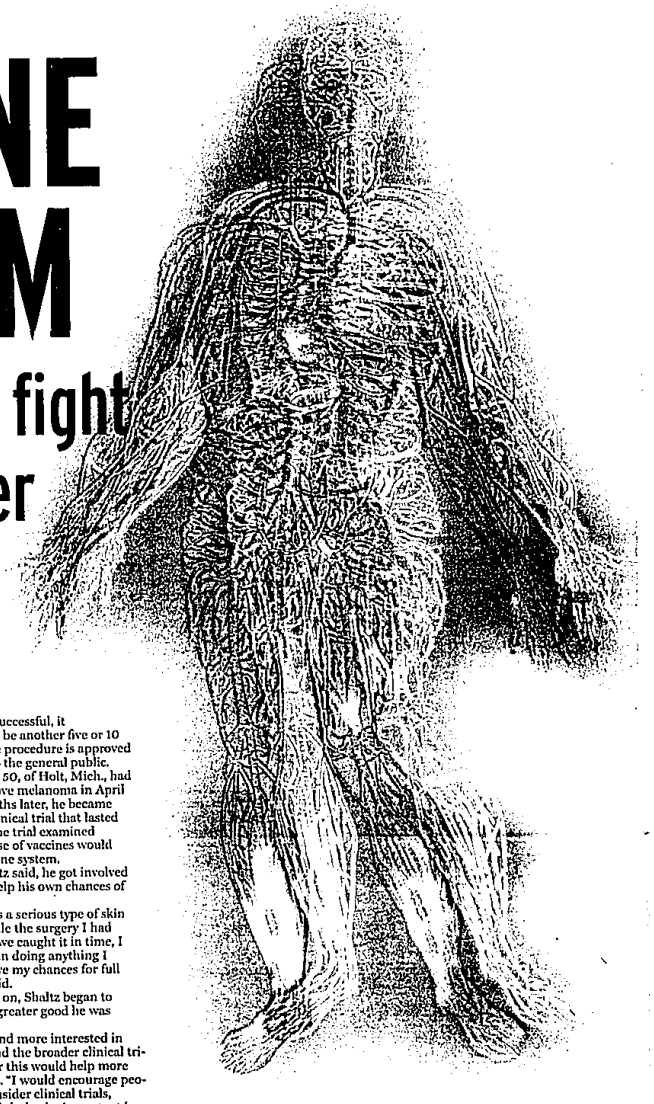
Time will be allotted for questions and open discussion. Those faced with holiday stress or concerned with family members are invited to attend. For more information about the discussion session or the Psychological Services Clinic, call (734) 432-5493.

Blood pressure

Beaumont Hospital needs people 18 and older with high blood pressure to volunteer for research studies on new medications. All study-related health care is provided at no charge to participants. Call the Division of Preventative and Nutritional Medicine in Royal Oak toll-free at (888) 807-8839 for more information.

The IMMUNE SYSTEM

An ally in the fight against cancer



BY DIANE GALE ANDREASSI
CORRESPONDENT

University of Michigan Health System doctors are studying the power of the body's immune system to fight cancer, and they point to the people involved in trial studies as the real super heroes.

Imagine vaccines that eradicate cancer the same way they fight smallpox, pneumonia and influenza. Or how freezing tumors helps cancer victims destroy bad cells with their own natural defense systems.

U-M Comprehensive Cancer Center doctors are taking their message to the public in community forums, like one held last month at the Livonia West Holiday Inn. They're talking about new developments in immune system therapy and how their research is zeroing in on ways to prevent, delay, stop and reverse cancer growth.

"One way I'm studying breast cancer is freezing the tumor and letting the immune system reabsorb the dead tumor cells," said Dr. Michael S. Sabel, U-M Health System assistant professor of surgery. "I'm hoping I can stimulate an immune response. When you freeze and kill cancer, the antigens are still present for the immune system to recognize."


Sabel

Sabel is conducting a trial at the cancer center with women in early-stage breast cancer. The cancer is frozen before it's removed surgically, allowing doctors to study whether the immune system has been stimulated.

"There's evidence that (cryosurgery) incites the immune system, and I believe that will make it better than surgery," he said. "I'm hoping that if the immune system can be stimulated, there will be less chance of cancer cells being left behind after surgery and there would be less likelihood of reoccurrence. The ultimate goal is that women would not need the lumpectomy."

CLINICAL TRIALS

U-M Health System doctors credit the hundreds of people who become involved in the clinical trials with helping them make breakthroughs. Each trial requires 25 to 900 people.

"Options in treatments we can offer patients today are based on trials 10 years ago," Sabel said. "Women who are involved in trials today are affecting women 10 years from now. I can't promise a benefit, but it's not going to hurt them. Hopefully, there are benefits. The reason to be involved is to help their daughters, their nieces and women they don't even know."

If Sabel's trial shows that cryosurgery is successful, it would probably be another five or 10 years before the procedure is approved and available to the general public.

David Shaltz, 50, of Holt, Mich., had surgery to remove melanoma in April 1999. Five months later, he became involved in a clinical trial that lasted about a year. The trial examined whether a course of vaccines would boost his immune system.

Frankly, Shaltz said, he got involved in the trial to help his own chances of survival.

"Melanoma is a serious type of skin cancer, and while the surgery I had suggested that we caught it in time, I was interested in doing anything I could to improve my chances for full recovery," he said.

As time went on, Shaltz began to appreciate the greater good he was achieving.

"I got more and more interested in study results and the broader clinical trials and whether this would help more people," he said. "I would encourage people to really consider clinical trials, because I do think they're important in advancing what we know about diseases."

IMMUNE SYSTEM AS FIGHTER

Using vaccines to fight cancer focuses on ways the immune system can eliminate bad cells the same way it fights infection, said Dr. Alfred E. Chang, chief of the U-M Health System Division of Surgical Oncology.

Vaccines are being used in cancer trial studies in the same way they have been used for generations to fight smallpox. During the clinical trials, cancer started going away in some patients with advanced cancer.

The immune system works by recognizing proteins on the surface of bacteria or cells infected by viruses that are different than the body's proteins. Tumor cells show similar proteins, and U-M doctors are studying ways to stimulate the immune system to recognize these antigens and kill cancer cells.

Cancer vaccines haven't been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. However, clinical studies are showing good possibilities of their use to fight cancer.

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Dr. Michael S. Sabel
assistant professor or surgery, U-M Health System

The trials involve collecting circulating cells, called dendritic cells, normally present in everyone, and stimulating those cells with tumor antigens. The dendritic cells take up the antigen and jump-start the patient's immune system, which hopefully triggers a response against the patient's own tumor.

Another approach is to take the dendritic cells from the patient and inject them into the tumor to stimulate the immune system. These dendritic cell trials are restricted to people who have advanced cancers that have not responded to other treatments. The National Cancer Institute Trials Database provides a list and description of many clinical trials across the country.

MELANOMA

On another frontier, a vaccine made from other people's melanoma is being studied in research trials conducted by Dr. Vernon K. Sondak, U-M Health System professor of surgery.

"We're using the vaccine to take care of the leftover cells," Sondak said.

PLEASE SEE TRIALS, C7

Open-heart surgery marks 50th anniversary

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the world's first successful open heart surgery, a procedure that made medical history in 1952.

Dr. Forest Dewey Dodrill captured national headlines when he used a mechanical heart pump to operate on a patient at Wayne State University's Harper Hospital in Detroit.

Paid for in part by the American Heart Association, and billed as a public service by General Motors, the Dodrill-GMR (General Motors Research) mechanical heart looked much like a Cadillac V-12 engine. This historic operation routed blood around the heart, allowing the surgeon to repair a damaged valve.

"We've come a long way since the first heart operation by Dodrill in 1952. Now, it's estimated that worldwide more than one million open heart operations are done using some form of heart-lung machine each year," said Dr. Larry Stephenson, Wayne State University cardiothoracic surgeon and medical historian, who documented and researched the historic operation.

"Without some form of blood pump of heart-lung machine, many of the heart operations we routinely do would not be possible."

According to the American Heart Association, 753,000 open-heart procedures were performed in 1999, the latest year for which figures are available.

In the early 1950s, there were few surgical options for people with heart ailments. A team of General Motors engineers used Dodrill's conceptual designs to construct a machine that was used not in a vehicle but in an operating room.

"To develop this revolutionary machine, many GM engineers and researchers volunteered their time to support this great medical advancement," said Dr. Joel Bender, General Motors corporate medical director. "Today, GM continues the tradition of

PLEASE SEE SURGERY, C7


The first patient to undergo surgery with the mechanical heart was a man who had a mitral valve repair at Wayne State University's Harper Hospital.