Centering on Health and Wellness by Kimberly Rios

Every Tuesday and Thursday, a group of Azusa residents gather outside a small building on Dalton Avenue. Teaming with energy, these individuals anticipate a three-mile walk or jog looping through upper Azusa. Not all are seasoned, but everyone holds two things in common: They are committed to maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle, and they use the resources afforded by Azusa Pacific University’s Neighborhood Wellness Center (NWC). For almost 15 years, the NWC has provided city residents with a place where they can learn more about their health and how to achieve a quality life. A joint effort between Azusa Pacific University and the city of Azusa, the NWC enables the APU nursing School of Nursing to give back to the local community. APU nursing students and faculty members help transform lives as they employ their knowledge and training to help educate individuals. Julie Pusztai, MSN, RN, NWC Director, and Juana Rivera, athletic trainer for the Azusa Walks program, partner to run the center and implement new programs that assist residents with their health concerns and wellness goals.

"The wellness center is a very unique community program that provides our guests with education and the necessary support to make decisions that promote a long and healthy life," said Pusztai. With two Azusa locations, the center champions programs suited to the varied needs of the city’s diverse population, including routine health screenings. To date, more than 1,800 Azusa residents have taken advantage of this service. Since 1998, the NWC has recorded more than 8,200 visits, including appointments and walk-ins. From providing tips on diabetes prevention to explaining nutrition guidelines, APU nursing students and faculty members help transform lives as neighbors seize the opportunity to change poor health behaviors and improve outcomes.

To complement the health screenings, the NWC implemented fitness programs to encourage physical activity. The Presidential Azusa Walks program, held Tuesdays and Thursdays, remains the center’s most popular option. Each week, 6 to 15 participants gather at the NWC to begin the three-mile walk across North Azusa. Individuals travel at their own pace, whether they prefer running or walking, and use a pedometer to measure progress on the walk and at home. The NWC also runs the Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N) program, which emphasizes diabetes and obesity prevention services at the center, schools, churches, and other community groups.

"I like the Azusa Walks program because when I walk, I feel better," said Alicia Albamar, a program participant. "Plus, the pedometer I received through the program motivates me. It tells me if I haven’t walked enough and keeps me accountable."

For a second year, the NWC received a $5,000 community grant from the Kaiser Permanente Baldwin Park Medical Center to continue the Let’s Start at the Very Beginning, a program for mothers and their families that seeks to reduce obesity and prevent chronic disease. The no-cost program combines nutrition counseling and physical activity education, and participants are encouraged to join a walking class led by a certified athletic trainer.

Local women, including those who are pregnant and have permission from their doctors, can enroll anytime. Through these foundational programs, the NWC affirms its commitment to helping Azuans be healthy.

Kimberly Rios ’13 received a Celebrate Azusa Nancy Moine Scholarship, is a C.H.A.M.P. alumna, and graduated in May from Azusa Pacific University. She begins the Master of Arts in Management program at APU this summer.

Azusa Connects
Keeping Emotionally Fit by Reducing Stress

by Scott Bledsoe

We all experience some stress as part of our normal, everyday lives. As we mature, we learn to cope with stress by participating in sports, drama, book clubs, church groups, etc. However, stress can periodically sneak in, build up, and keep us from reaching our goals. It may impact us physiologically through increased heart rate, reddening of the skin, or muscle tension; and on a cognitive level, affecting our memory and problem-solving skills. To successfully manage your stress, keep these four things in mind:

1. Stress can be a good thing. It’s our body’s way of telling us to slow down and ease up. Stress acts like the warning light in a car that indicates a problem. If you heed the warning, you can return to normal levels of operation. If not, negative things may happen not only to your body but also your emotions, and possibly your outlook on life.

2. Stressful thoughts and physical complaints (e.g., stomachaches, muscle tension) often work together as part of a vicious cycle. You can interrupt the cycle by taking a deep breath, deep breathing—literally breathing out the stress—which will help you to become stress-free. Try it for a week and you may be able to reduce your negative thoughts and physical problems.

3. If you suffer from stress on a daily basis, take a holiday from your daily routine. Pick a special day that does not involve typical stress-related activities. For example, if you often have arguments with your family and friends over the phone, or if you do not have much time for programs and control of the remote, consider implementing a TV-free day.

4. It may be helpful to create an emotional toolkit out of a shopping bag or shoe box in which you keep specific items to maintain psychological wellness. Examples follow:

Coping skills list: What do you do to reduce your stress level? Do you listen to music or take a walk? Make a list of your coping skills and keep it in your toolkit for stressful times.

Favorite CDs, books, and relaxation tapes: Include CDs and books that provide relaxation and well-being.

Time management: A big part of psychological fitness involves knowing how to manage your time. A daily planner or hand-made calendar can provide a visual way of planning ahead effectively.

Spiritual tools: Feeling overwhelmed can sometimes have a negative impact on your relationship with God. Your toolkit can include your Bible and a list of favorite Scriptures.

Important phone numbers: Know who to call for support when you need it. Phoning a friend or family member can be just the thing you need when feeling low.

In short, stress involves a complex process that impacts both our bodies and minds. No single solution works for everyone and no solution will work without motivation and planning. Don’t allow the enormity of the moment to keep you from realizing the joy you can have on any day. Remember that Christ is there for you during the hardest of times, as stated in Matthew 11:28: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

In closing, be aware that stress is a part of life. It is an unavoidable part of life, but it can be managed. The next time you find yourself under stress, take a few minutes to practice one of the techniques mentioned above. You will be surprised at the results!

Moving to Change by Becky Kofie

Sloven middle school girls stood awkwardly in the center of a linoleum floored room, glancing from their reflections in the mirrored wall to the unattainable college student standing before them. Five weeks later, these same adolescents danced in rhythmic synchronization to their favorite new hip-hop aerobics routine, wishing the session didn’t have to end. Two years later, the city of Azusa continues to garner support for such programs that promote a healthy lifestyle.

Moving Children Toward Healthy Living

As director of community relations, Ginny Dadaian loves discovering new ways to help Azusa Pacific University serve its surrounding community. So when Julie Puzaei, MIN, RN, APU’s director of the Neighborhood Wellness Center, expressed interest in working with APU students to expand the center’s programming, Dadaian leaped at the opportunity.

“Wow, the kids were excited!” said Lehman. “I think it would be beneficial for APU to offer professional development training and could be the ideal solution to the problem. Under this proposal, optometrists and pharmacists would be permitted to set up their practices in community-based institutions that provide this care. Let’s say 10,000 pharmacies, 1,000 groceries, 1,000 insurance, managed care, and the drug abuse, mental health, health care, he ran for office and was elected to the Assembly. In 2006, he won a seat in the California State Senate in 2010.

APU: How would the Affordable Care Act (ACA) impact Californians?

HERNANDEZ: A U.S. could save billions of dollars that would go directly into care for the uninsured. Our research has shown that uninsured people are 40% less likely to receive early preventive care and are 50% less likely to receive needed treatment. The ACA will provide health insurance to millions of uninsured people. It will also make significant improvements to the nation’s health care system. The ACA will also ensure that the costs of health care are spread across the population and reduce the deficit.

Hernandez added, “I have proposed legislation that would increase the number of primary care physicians in California. We need to ensure that all Californians have access to affordable, quality health care, and that our medical professionals are able to practice to the full extent of their training and capabilities.”

 DCHECK: Scott Bledsoe, PsyD, a psychologist, is an assistant professor in APU’s Department of Graduate Psychology and serves on the Azusa Nazarene Voucher Task Force and board of Homeless House.

Lehman, Ed.D., chair of APU’s Community Counseling Center, said Lehman. “We all experience some stress as part of our normal, everyday lives. As we mature, we learn to cope with stress by participating in sports, drama, book clubs, church groups, etc. However, stress can periodically sneak in, build up, and keep us from reaching our goals. It may impact us physiologically through increased heart rate, reddening of the skin, or muscle tension; and on a cognitive level, affecting our memory and problem-solving skills. To successfully manage your stress, keep these four things in mind:

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