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HEARING LOSS SUPPORT GROUP TO MEET MARCH 31 AT LAKE DEATON CARE CENTER

Vjolka Zaka with the Villages Health runs the Hearing Loss Support Group, an interactive forum to inform, educate and support those with hearing loss. Its next meeting will take place from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. March 31 at the Lake Deaton Care Center. Register at thevillageshealth.com/learning-center/. (Joseph Francis, Daily Sun)

KARATE INSTRUCTOR TEACHES ADVANCED, BEGINNER COURSES

Lee Aiello leads Karate 4 Life. Each of his four classes focus on traditional forms of karate and can build balance and core strength. Those with prior experience can join one of three advanced classes, and for first time practitioners there is a beginner class. For information, check the Recreation Publication or call Aiello at 352-751-3379. (Joseph Francis, Daily Sun)

TODAY'S TOPIC
HEALTH EDUCATION

The Villages Health hosts a myasthenia gravis support group. The group came about organically because there was a need for those with myasthenia gravis and their loved ones to get in touch with others.

By JOSEPH FRANCIS
Daily Sun Staff Writer

The Villages Health's Population Health Team convened the first meeting of the myasthenia gravis support group in April 2022.

Led by population health manager Amy Wixted, the group first came about at the suggestion of Jane D'Auria, who had hit a roadblock in her search for local resources regarding myasthenia gravis.

Her husband, Ray, had been diagnosed with the condition, and both she and Wixted agreed on the need for a network for

individuals and their caregivers. "I thought it was important to see others out there, and I felt that in The Villages there must be others with myasthenia gravis," said Jane, of the Village of Chitty Chatty. "If they saw there was a group, they would come." Come they did.

Myasthenia gravis is a chronic neuromuscular disease that is characterized by a weakness in skeletal muscles. Common symptoms including difficulty chewing and swallowing, a drooping eyelids, and weakness in the neck, arms and leg muscles. At a meeting on March 8, the

group heard from Dr. Joseph Licht with St. Luke's in The Villages about the intersection of myasthenia gravis and eye health.

Often the group will host a guest speaker before rounding out their meetings with a Q&A, although Wixted said the meetings can be fluid.

Jane knew the group was in good hands because of her experiences working as a volunteer with The Villages Health.

"I knew Amy pretty well, so if anyone could pull it off, it was her," she said. "She always finds great speakers."

They also share personal experiences with one another.

"We have been able to hear stories from others, including some who have had it for 25 years," Jane said. "Each person handles it differently, and they each have techniques that work for them. If you say you're having a problem, chances are someone else in the group has had it and found a way to overcome it."

Stan Kotzker, of the Village of Hadley, touched upon the invisible nature of myasthenia gravis, which has changed how he approached simple tasks such as golf or going to see the doctor.

"I can still go out and play nine holes of golf, but when I get home I have to sit in a chair for 45 minutes before I can even think about taking a shower," he said. "There are certain medications you cannot be prescribed, and simple



Submitted photo

Amy Wixted is the population health manager for The Villages Health. In her role, she oversees a variety of educational and support-based programs.

procedures that might need additional accommodations."

Having lived with myasthenia gravis for awhile, Kotzker knew he was in a great position to be a mentor to others who with a diagnosis.

"I learned from a neighbor of a person in my neighborhood who had it," he said. "They sent him my way, and I was able to tell him a little bit about it."

While The Villages Health support group was by no means his first, Kotzker learned from one he attended in Orlando for eight years about the importance of such a community. "One of the biggest things for

me were the suggestions and recommendations for doctors," he said. "From that, I found a neurologist who exclusively saw patients with MG. Despite specializing in so many different conditions, there are neurologists who can go their entire career without seeing a single person with it."

The group consensus was that myasthenia gravis is often underrepresented and, by extension, healthcare professionals might treat it as something else entirely.

For Jane, it wasn't until her husband saw an eye doctor they found out the true nature of his condition.

"It's not taught as much as many other foremost diseases," she said. "We have a wonderful group, and they've

all had different ways of getting it diagnosed."

Wixted also had little experience with myasthenia gravis before putting together the support group. Now, however, she enjoys learning more about the condition and its challenges, as well as the inspiring individuals who come to the meetings.

With the right information and the right support, Wixted hopes the group will continue to provide for its attendees.

"Our goal is to keep people healthy," she said. "This support group is designed to bring relevant information and coordinated care to those who need it, and with that I believe there's no limit to what we can do."

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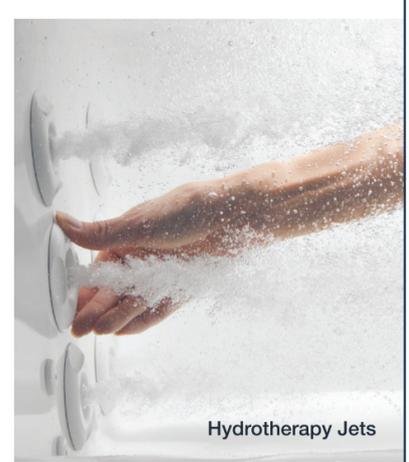
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