

# Health Mentors Program Newsletter

Volume 10, Issue 1

Fall 2016/Winter 2017

## Dear Health Mentors,

Thank you once again for sharing your time, stories, and experiences, as well as opening up your homes and hearts through the Health Mentors Program. With the perpetual cycle of tests, projects, and deadlines that graduate school entails, it can be too easy to lose touch with what matters most. The experience of learning in depth about another person, especially the many aspects of one's life that contribute to overall health and well-being, puts everything that we learn in the classroom into the proper human context. A particular illness goes from being an abstract concept in a textbook to something tangible that can impact every facet of an individual's life. Interacting with you through the Health Mentors Program has provided clear examples of how a person is much more than a diagnosis, and how patients can retain hope while managing their conditions effectively and even building wellness throughout illness. This is clearly seen by your willingness and enthusiasm to use your experiences to educate us, so that we may be more comprehensive and caring health care providers in the future.

One of the goals of the Health Mentors Program is to foster inter-professional collaboration among the multiple health disciplines at Jefferson. The first year students, who met their health mentors for the first time this past fall, took their mentor's health history and gained a deeper understanding of how each mentor's health concerns affected his or her life. For many students, this was the first opportunity to learn about the expertise and roles of other health care disciplines and get a sense of how the different disciplines can work together as a team. Second year students visited the homes of their mentors to better understand their daily routines and preferences, and in some cases to suggest home modifications to improve safety. This again provided an opportunity for students of different health disciplines to work together as a team, with each student focusing on his or her area of expertise. Further, this provided an opportunity to get to know our mentors in a more personal way. Being invited into and seeing the homes of our mentors makes all of the previous interactions, from history taking to storytelling, that much more meaningful.

Thank you again for sharing your lives with us. The Health Mentors Program is an incredibly educational and rewarding experience for us as students, and we hope that you have enjoyed the program as much as we have. We hope you enjoyed the holidays and look forward to seeing you again in the spring!

Best wishes,

Andrew Luzzi and the HMP Newsletter team

## In this issue:

"Components of a nutritious, healthy and balanced diet" and "Social Connection and Technology for All"

P2-P3

Thoughts from our Health Mentors

P3

Student Reflections

P4

## HMP Newsletter Editors

Couple & Family  
Therapy Student  
Colby Agostinelli

Medical Students  
Mica Kane  
Andrew Luzzi  
Nish Pandya  
Anjithaa Radakrishnan  
Naveed Rahman  
Mike Reynolds  
Anusha Vemuri

Nursing Student  
Deborah Shamilov

Pharmacy Students  
Huda Eldabbas  
Jose Fernandez

Occupational Therapy  
Student  
Iris Chiu

Physical Therapy  
Student  
Jenna-Marie Lewis

# Social Connection and Technology for All

by Iris Chiu

According to a Nielsen report in 2014, 48 percent of people who wear technology are between the ages of 18 and 34. People tend to think that older people are less interested in using technology than the younger generations, but this is not necessarily the case. There is now an abundance of gadgets that may offer health and wellness benefits for older individuals. Fitbit watches, for example, are very popular among young people and can be useful tools for health-conscious individuals of all ages. This easy-to-use device tracks physical activity, diet, heart rates, and number of steps taken daily.

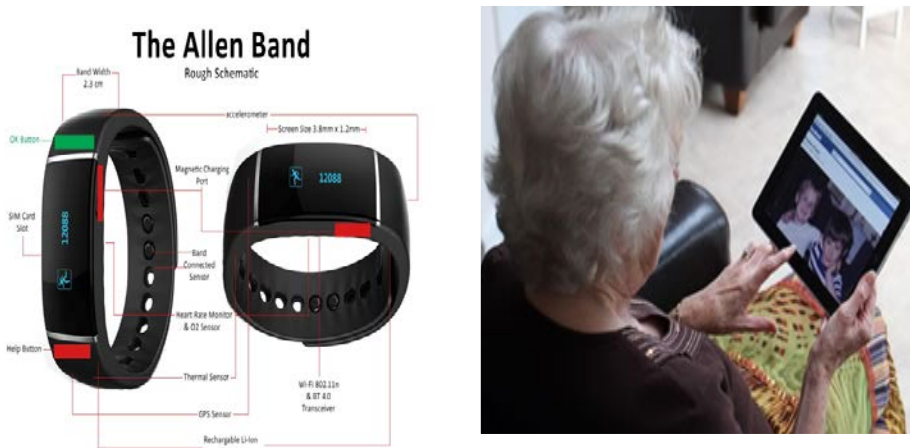


Image citations:

<http://theallenband.com/the-allen-band-idea/>

<http://leftfootforward.org/images/2015/02/Elderly-person-on-iPad.jpg>

In addition to monitoring heart rate, body temperature and movement, wearable technology like the Allen Band can even serve as an alert system for falls. If a person who wears this band falls and does not press a button on the band, a caregiver is automatically alerted.

Aside from just wearable technology, other forms of technology can be beneficial for making social connections. Skype video chatting, email, or social media allow us to connect and keep in contact with loved ones. A 2011 research study revealed that physical and mental health declined more slowly in elderly people who had "high social involvement which decreased slowly over time, or moderate social involvement which increased over time"; this highlights the importance of connecting with the community.

"A lot of people want to use technology to connect to friends, family ... and they don't exactly know what the first step is," reported Kaela Marcus-Kurn, one of the founders of Generation to Generation Technology, a student-run nonprofit in Maryland to teach technology skills. "It's very easy for us. I mean, we all use our iPhones every single day. We all have computers."

## Components of a nutritious, healthy and balanced diet

by Huda Eldabbas

Achieving a healthy diet can be challenging. It is influenced by many factors, including habits, social pressure, and personal preference. However, making even small changes can bring many health benefits. The best way to achieve a healthy diet is to eat food in balanced proportion, variety, and moderation. ChooseMyPlate.gov recommends:

- Replacing refined grains (like white rice and white bread) with whole grains
- Avoiding sugary drinks, bacon, cold cuts and processed meat
- Choosing fish, poultry beans, and nuts
- Limiting red meat and cheese
- Eating plenty of fruits and a variety of vegetables
- Using healthy oils like (olive and canola), and limiting butter and trans fat

Other healthy tips:

- Share meals when you go out
- Cook at home more often
- Use smaller plates
- Always read nutrition fact labels
- Eat the right amount of calories



References: Choose MyPlate. Choose MyPlate.  
<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.  
Accessed December 14, 2016.

The solution to this imbalance: partnering with the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging, Generations on Line (GoL), a group dedicated to enhancing internet literacy, created a mobile app last year called "Sip and Swipe Cafes" through Philadelphia to help with tablet training. "Tablets are easier," a spokesperson for GoL stated. "The new tablet users are fascinated with the media-rich opportunities that were more difficult and time consuming to access on personal computers."

In addition to learning how to use tablets, websites like Meetup.com, other community websites such as Philadelphia Corporation for Aging and Serve Philadelphia, or intergenerational volunteer opportunities can help older individuals to connect with others who share their common interests and values. It is through these personal connections that we can cultivate our health, because social and emotional well-being has such a vital impact on physical health.

#### Resources:

Alden, Sharyn (2011). *Socially Active Older Adults Have Slower Rates of Health Declines*. Retrieved December 2016, from Center for Advancing Health: <http://www.cfah.org/hbns/2011/socially-active-older-adults-have-slower-rates-of-health-declines>

Domen, John (2016). *Student-run, Md. nonprofit teaches elderly how to use technology*. Retrieved December 2016, from Washington's Top News: <http://wtop.com/montgomery-county/2016/12/student-run-md-nonprofit-teaches-elderly-use-technology/>

Drakeford, Courtney (2016). *Wearable Technology and Healthcare: Elderly People Can Benefit From Fitbits and Other Devices*. Retrieved December 2016, from International Business Times: <http://www.ibtimes.com/wearable-technology-healthcare-elderly-people-can-benefit-fitbits-other-devices-2452900>

Garcia, Cecilia & Harootyan, Bob (n.d.). *Helping Seniors Bridge the Digital Divide*. Retrieved December 2016, from Benton Foundation: <https://www.benton.org/blog/helping-seniors-bridge-digital-divide>

Herman, Christine (2016). *Social Connections and Healthy Aging*. Retrieved December 2016, from National Indian Council on Aging: <http://nicoa.org/healthy-social-connections-foster-health-as-we-age/>

Razani, Amanda (2016). *Can Wearable Technology Help the Elderly?* Retrieved December 2016, from Readwrite: <http://readwrite.com/2016/12/09/how-wearable-technology-can-help-the-elderly-dl4/>

## Upcoming Spring Meetings

Details for the meetings are included in the letters to the Health Mentors. For Year One mentors, students will come to your home for the visit (if you are comfortable with this). For Year Two mentors, your meetings with the students have been completed. Faculty will be in touch in late spring to confirm if you are available to sign up to meet with a new team.

## Thoughts from Our Health Mentors

by Mica Kane

After volunteering as a health mentor for several years, Mrs. G thinks that the program helps future health professionals learn how to work together to better serve each individual patient and improve their daily lives. She reflects on why she enjoys being a health mentor: "I like to share everything with the students. I like what we talk about and how they listen. They listen very carefully to what the patient has to say."

Another health mentor feels that interacting with students from different health disciplines through this program benefits both the mentor and the student. He describes why he thinks this is important: "It helps the students realize that they have to have a good connection with the patient. Patients are human beings, and they can have a lot of problems. They must connect and listen to the patient. The patient has a lot to share about themselves, their illness, and their pain."

When asked about what she has gained by participating in the program, Mrs. G explains that she wants her group of future nurses, doctors, and physical therapists to learn about the best and most thoughtful ways to communicate with their patients. She further adds, "I like to help them and to share what I think and what I feel. I like it very much. It's nice to have someone listen to you very carefully, and that is not always something you have in your normal life."

Both the health mentors and their students are looking forward to learning more about each other as the program continues!

# Student Reflections

by Deborah Shamilov

The HMP program has had a major impact on Thomas Jefferson students from all health professions. When asked about their experiences with the program, the nursing students in the class of 2018 had a lot to say.

The program allows for a well-rounded understanding of inter-professional relationships and the experiences that revolve around being a healthcare professional. Leslie B. stated, "It is nice to be in a group with students who are not all in your major, and meeting other students on campus." Many students now feel more prepared for entering a real-world setting where they will have to communicate with doctors, OT's, PT's, PA's, and others. As Shivani S. expressed, "HMP is preparing us for post-school experiences such as working with different professionals. We are now able to understand their viewpoints towards healthcare." Stacy S. feels the same way, saying, "It is good to interact with different healthcare professionals to see what it will be like in the real world setting."

Thank you TJU for this wonderful eye-opening experience!

by Jose B. Fernandez Jr.

"We are so grateful to you for deciding to share your time and experiences with us. As a second year student, I hope that we, in return, were able to provide you with some suggestions for improving your safety and quality of life based on your specific preferences and lifestyle. As an interprofessional team, we had the opportunity to work together, see through one another's eyes, and learn from each other's perspectives. The Health Mentors Program provides a valuable learning experience and gives us the resources to become better health professionals than we otherwise would have been. We learn not only from one another, as students, but first and foremost from you, our health mentors.

Your insights and personal reflections about your condition or impairment is an element of our learning that cannot be obtained in a classroom. Hearing your stories and concerns encourages us, as future health care professionals, to identify with you and relate to your struggles and successes. During our education at TJU, we learn that it is crucial to build rapport with our patients, in order to develop empathy and increase trust. Through the Health Mentors Program, we begin to practice and build these skills. By volunteering and becoming our mentors, you have participated in teaching us key attributes that will make us more effective and empathic health care providers. Through experiences like these, you are helping to create the next generation of health care professionals—people who will have the knowledge to educate their patients, but also the desire to learn from them, to better themselves and our community."

## A Student's Opinion

"The Health Mentors Program is a great opportunity to work with students from other health professional programs and be able to see the difference we make in the health mentor's life over the course of the two years."

—Mirna Rezkalla,  
second year Pharmacy  
student

## Spread the word, volunteers needed!

We are looking for a variety of Health Mentors from all different backgrounds who are at least 18 years of age and are living with chronic conditions or impairments (high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, blindness, etc.) or are a caretaker to someone who is living with chronic conditions or impairments and who enjoy sharing their personal health experiences.

If you know someone who is interested in learning more about the Health Mentors Program, please have him or her contact Sarah Dallas!

Phone: 215-955-8601

Email: [Sarah.Dallas@jefferson.edu](mailto:Sarah.Dallas@jefferson.edu)

Or visit our website to complete an online application: [www.jefferson.edu/health-mentor](http://www.jefferson.edu/health-mentor)