

# Health Mentors Program Newsletter

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## Dear Health Mentors,

As we close another school year, we want to thank you for your time and help this semester. You share your disease states with us and help us connect what we learn in the classroom to real-life patients. Your contribution to our program is vital, and we could not do it without you. We learn from you how to work collaboratively as part of a team. By sharing your experiences, you allow a team of medical, pharmacy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, physician assistant, couple and family therapy, medical laboratory science and nursing students to see the disease states from the perspective of the most important person in collaborative care - the patient. The time we spend with you helps us become better future clinicians.

In addition to the goal of fostering interprofessionalism and collaboration, the health mentors program strives to help students see patients as unique individuals, and not just diseases. This spring, the first year students had the opportunity to get to know their health mentors on a more personal level by visiting the health mentors in their place of residence. This allows the students to see the different aspects of their health mentor's life which makes that person special and unique. Through this experience, the students are able to gain a deeper understanding of who their health mentor is as a person and a more cohesive idea of how their mentor's life is affected by various health conditions. It is experiences like these that can have a lasting impact on how health care providers view their relationships with the people for whom they care. The second year students spent time reflecting on their experience with their health mentors and the health mentors program in general and discussed the positive ways in which the program shaped their understanding of patient care.

Thank you again for sharing your experiences with us. It has been a pleasure spending time with you and learning from you. You have a truly positive impact on the students of Jefferson.

Best wishes,

Andrew Luzzi and Huda Eldabbas, and the HMP Newsletter team

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## Why Be Outdoorsy

by Iris Chiu

Environment has been important in shaping people's health for centuries. It is often said that a walk outside can drastically boost one's mood. However, it is more than just a saying - this piece of colloquialism has its backing. Green space's therapeutic effect on one's mental health is not to be understated.

People of various ages, genders and mental health status were found to have improved physical and mental health after exercising in nature (Barton & Pretty, 2010). Possible activities ranged from walking to boating to gardening. Green spaces with water were even better for health. Was there a magic number for how long to stay in nature to see these benefits? According to these researchers, even a five minute tour in nature would help one reap these benefits (Barton & Pretty, 2010).

Image retrieved from  
<https://image.shutterstock.com/z/sto-ck-photo-happy-senior-handicapped-lady-with-a-walking-disability-enjoying-a-walk-in-a-sunny-park-pushing-her-375165865.jpg>

Researchers in Metro Vancouver, Canada, interviewed older adults 65 to 86 years old who described their everyday experiences with green and especially blue spaces (Finlay et al., 2015). Places that were cited as having therapeutic qualities were parks, gardens, street greenery, lakes, and the ocean, all of which helped enhance their physical, mental, and social health. This is important information because it supports other studies that have also found the beneficial impact of nature on health. While social isolation was one of the strongest predictors of stress of poor overall health in urban communities, the amount and availability of green space significantly impacted stress levels of residents (Thompson et al., 2016). In fact, nature's benefits are significant enough that researchers have probed how one may enhance everyday bike exercises for the elderly by creating a virtual environment to help simulate the experiences of nature, even though this is still currently in progress (Bruun-Pedersen et al., 2015).

After conducting a study comparing the brain activity of sedentary mice to those that exercised on running wheels, researchers from Yale University discovered that exercise can help enhance an exercise related gene in the brain that works as an antidepressant (Hunsberger et al., 2007). Other benefits for seniors from physical activity in nature include the following: better quality sleep, boosting vitamin D levels and defense to fight diseases, energizing, and helping to recover from injuries faster (Benefits, 2016).

Forming outdoor exercise groups for seniors in the community, as appropriate, may be helpful for enhancing social bonds too. Some outdoor activities include: metal detecting, flea market shopping, outdoor concerts, Tai Chi, flying kites, garden parties, picnics, yard games, and photography. While planning outings, it is important to consider your physical abilities too. Consult with your physician before doing anything too strenuous or if you have any questions about what you can or cannot do to maximize your safety. It is also helpful to think of ways you can conserve your energy during outings if you feel tired, such as sitting down during your rest break. Enjoy and relax in nature, and be safe this summer!

### References

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Four years ago, Ms. Stewart was working on losing weight in order to qualify for gastric bypass surgery. She encountered a setback when a new condition meant that she didn't qualify for the surgery. During this disappointing time, she came across a flyer for the Health Mentors Program. So far she has been a mentor to two teams of students. This is her reflection on the positive outcomes she has achieved since becoming a Health Mentor.

### 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:

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## Ms. Stewart's Story

by Ava Stewart

My story....it's been four years since I started changing my way of eating. In year one and year two the home visits were positive experiences with the students! In year one, I was encouraged to continue making healthy life changes in my diet. My PCP agreed with this! The year one students suggested I put a mini-refrigerator in my bedroom since my sugars drop at night. Well, it's working! No recent visits to the ER for hyperglycemia episodes!

In the second year home visit, the students suggested that since I've had multiple falls in my home...could one of the causes be from my multiple throw rugs in my home? A great observation was that the students particularly noted a throw rug at the top of my steps. So I've removed the rugs! I haven't had a fall or trip in a while!

One unforgotten experience is the first home visit while we all were in my kitchen; one student said, "Oh my grandmother had a utility cart like this in her kitchen!" He was so enthused and it brought back memories! I said, "Young man, I hope after graduation you'll be just as enthused with patient care!" He said he would because Jefferson has a lot to offer.

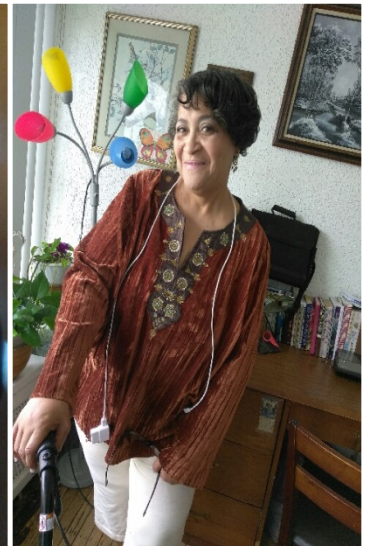
What has impressed me the most is that in both years the students were interested in my health! Both encouraged me to continue eating healthy. Up to date I've lost 142 lbs! My goal is to lose 79-100 more pounds. None of this was because of weight reduction surgery. All of this is from my determination and being privileged to cross paths at the right time in the Health Mentors Program with students that cared about me as a unique individual! I'm hoping each and every one of them will be successful in their profession and remain caring people!!!!



Before, 381 lbs



2 Years Ago, 270 lbs



After, 239 lbs

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

## Thoughts from Our Health Mentors

by Mica Kane

After another wonderful spring session, our health mentors had a lot to say about this year's program:

"The experience of the mentor program was extremely rewarding. I felt that I was able to bring my perspective as a patient to my team. I view myself as an informed and active participant in my health care, not just someone that takes the green pill without knowing exactly what it is, why it is prescribed, what it does, and if there are side effects. The same is true of any procedures that may be ordered. I hope that I shared that philosophy and experience with my team...I felt it was important that I impart the concept that health care is a team effort with my students. All of the medical disciplines play a very important role in the overall care, and communication between specialties and disciplines is critical. Also, the communication with the various ancillary departments is critical. I felt that it was important to stress the overall need to communicate to the team. It is important to educate the patient that the patient is an active member and participant in their care; they too are part of the medical team...It was the need for clear and constant communication that I think was the single most important thing that I stressed... I really enjoy being part of the Jefferson Health Mentors Program and look forward to the next team that I work with." - *Harry C. Bellangy*

"[The program] was absolutely fantastic for the future doctors and nurses. Five years ago, I had a stroke, so it really limited what I could do. I took away [from the program] that I can talk, but the students took away a different kind of message. They took away what aphasia was like. That's when you can't speak, read, write, or anything like that. I can write, I can read, and I can talk. So that's pretty good. I think it was fantastic for both me and the students." - *Mr. F.*

"The health mentors program was an extremely valuable experience. It allowed me to work in an interprofessional team to care for a "patient". The program taught me how to work collaboratively with others and even helped improve my problem-solving skills. Most importantly, the health mentors program helped me learn about the roles different healthcare professionals can play in delivering patient care. This program was a valuable experience because not only did it teach me how to work with this interdisciplinary team, but also it helped me in communicating with patients. In my future pharmacy career, I hope to continue to work in an inter-professional team since it was such an enjoyable experience to me in school."

*Christina Karalis*

Jefferson College of Pharmacy, Class of 2019

## What Our Students Say About the Program

by Mirna Rezkalla

"Health Mentors is a wonderful experience to collaborate with other healthcare professions and gain a distinct perspective. It was nice to know that you don't have to be the expert in everything and that other members of the healthcare team exist to provide patient care. In the future, I will be able to reach out to other members in areas I am not confident in."

*Alexa Barile*

Jefferson College of Nursing, class of 2017

"I thoroughly enjoyed the Health Mentor's Program. I thought it was a fantastic opportunity to interact and build rapport with students of other professions. Also, the chance to connect to our health mentor and his/her struggles on a deeply personal level was humbling. Indeed, healthcare is a team effort, and the Health Mentors Program gives us the opportunity to get a head start!"

*Matthew Sikina*

Sidney Kimmel Medical College, class of 2020