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# Aging Well: Informing Seniors About Local Resources Throughout The Aging Process

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Family Medicine, May 2017  
Fairfield Street Health Center  
Project Mentor: Max Bayard, MD

# Problem Identification: Franklin County, VT

## Elderly Population

→ Seniors 65 years and older make up 14.3% of the population in Franklin County VT<sup>1</sup>

→ This percentage of seniors 65 years and older has increased more than 2% in just the last 5 years<sup>1</sup>

→ Vermont's population of seniors 65+ is expected to rise to 23.8% making it #1 in the country by the year 2023<sup>2</sup>

→ "Transportation", "Maintaining Independence and Dignity", "Family & Caregiver Support", and "Food and Nutrition" were found to be among the top 7 issues of concern for Vermont's aging population<sup>2</sup>

## Availability and Access to Resources

→ The entire state of VT is considered 'rural' by federal OAA definition<sup>2</sup>

→ Elderly people in rural areas face less access to health services which in turn tend to be costlier<sup>2</sup>

→ Rural older adults have to travel farther to access services, but have less access to transportation<sup>2</sup>

→ Living in rural areas also distances seniors from family and other potential caregivers

# Public Health Costs

- The cost of nursing home care in VT is among the highest in the country at \$232 per day<sup>3</sup>

While 89% of senior citizens in the country prefer to live at home for as long as they are able, VT nursing homes had an occupancy rate of 92% in 2007<sup>3</sup>
- All-cause readmission rate for patients 65 years and older within 30 days of discharge at Northwestern Medical Center in Saint Albans VT is 15.2% (the national average)<sup>4</sup>

The cost of hospital readmissions for Medicare patients is \$26 billion annually, and greater than \$17 billion of this cost is due to return trips that would not happen if patients received the right care prior to discharge<sup>5</sup>
- With the costs of nursing facilities and hospital readmissions, it is essential to support seniors living independently and to ensure adequate discharge plans and follow-up care

# Community Perspective

**Shaina is a social worker at Fairfield Street Health Center to who had the following to say:**

- Age Well VT provides a lot of services that many people don't know about, even from reading through their website
- Calling their helpline would be a great way for patients to voice their concerns to an Age Well agent, who can then inform them of local resources that best suit their needs
- It would be good idea to put a handout in the waiting room as this can reduce time spent discussing care coordination for the doctor if his patients have access to this information beforehand

**Monica is a PA at the practice who was interested in learning more about eligibility criteria for patients, and was surprised to hear that it is run by local volunteers. She had the following thoughts:**

- Was not aware of Age Well VT as a local agency prior to the interview
- Sees patients who need these types of services every single day in her practice
- Will often spend 7 minutes during the visit just discussing how a patient will be able to get to a subspecialist appointment that took a long time to arrange in the first place
- Works with patients in the hospital as well, who would benefit from a discharge care coordinator to ensure their success in the community

# Intervention & Methodology

- A community resource able to address the issues faced by elderly citizens in Franklin County was identified: **Age Well VT**
- Information was gathered from the Age Well VT website, conversations with organization representatives, and providers with previous experience recommending their services including
  - Purpose of organization
  - Services provided
  - Contact info
  - Volunteer opportunities
- Information gathered was put into an easy to read handout, with the goal of allowing patients and their families to better understand the resources available through Age Well VT
- The handout would ideally serve as a means of introducing the patient and their family to Age Well VT for current or future needs during the office visit, allowing the patient to
  - review the information with the provider
  - ask clarifying questions
  - take home a tangible copy with contact info

# Intervention and Methodology:

# Informational Handout

- To be placed in the waiting room
- Utilized by the office social worker
- Given to patients and their families during regular office visits if the topic of elderly care is relevant to the patient



## TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

→Need a ride somewhere?

Could you use an extra hand with yardwork or grocery shopping?



*"I enjoy the meals but more importantly, I love the friendly volunteers who always take the time to chat. It's something I look forward to."*  
– Lula

## MEALS on WHEELS

Helps **9 OUT OF 10** recipients feel more safe and secure in their own homes.



## CARE TRANSITIONS

→Going home after a hospital stay or rehab?

Do you or a loved one need help with hospital discharge planning?

## HEALTH



83% of Meals on Wheels clients say it helps improve their overall health.

## CAREGIVER SUPPORT

*"FAMILY FIRST, ALWAYS FIRST. Age Well has been a lifesaver for my Mother and myself. Without Age Well caseworkers, we would not know what to do. With their knowledge and expertise, we were able to get the services to effectively manage our day-to-day life with Alzheimer's."*  
– Kim Roberts, Daughter and caregiver of Age Well client



## HELPLINE

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# Results/Response

- The handout was shown to multiple employees at the Fairfield Street Health Center who all gave a very positive response to the information provided on the handout
  - easy to read
  - simple terms
  - will catch your eye in the waiting room
- It was recommended that it be placed in the waiting room as a way to inform patients of this agency and their services even prior to their physician visit
- Shaina the social worker also responded:
  - “Many of the patients I see need some help with basic daily tasks such as cooking and household work, so it is really great that these services are included on the handout as well”*



# Evaluation of Effectiveness & Limitations

- The handout can be placed in waiting rooms / given to patients during office visits with the provider or social worker, and effectiveness can be evaluated through patient feedback
- It can also be determined at follow-up visits whether patients and their families were able to contact Age Well VT and benefit from their services. The continuity of care at the Fairfield Street Health Center allows this sort of long term follow-up.
- Percent of patients given the handout vs. those who actually used Age Well VT services could be compared using documentation in the EHR
- Limitations could be due to an imbalance between Age Well VT volunteers and demand for services, or the desire for seniors to live independently without any support services. For seniors interested in volunteering, lack of reliable transportation may prevent their doing so

# Recommendations for Future Interventions & Projects

- A future project could design a different handout for the purpose of recruiting younger community members as Age Well VT volunteers
- As companionship is a big issue for many senior citizens living rurally, a program for connecting seniors to local elementary/middle/high-school students on a regular basis could be developed through the local public school system
- It would also be beneficial to survey elderly patients at the Fairfield Street Health Center on what issues they consider to be the greatest burden on quality of life/daily level of functioning
- This survey could be used to inform Age Well VT on other services they may consider implementing through their organization in the future

# References

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Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This project is a requirement for the Family Medicine clerkship. It will be stored on the Dana Library Scholar Works website. Your name will be attached to your interview and you may be cited directly or indirectly in subsequent unpublished or published work. The interviewer affirms that he/she has explained the nature and purpose of this project. The interviewee affirms that he/she has consented to this interview.

Yes  / No

If not consenting as above: please add the interviewee names here for the department of Family Medicine information only.

Name: Shaina Lussier

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This project is a requirement for the Family Medicine clerkship. It will be stored on the Dana Library Scholar Works website. Your name will be attached to your interview and you may be cited directly or indirectly in subsequent unpublished or published work. The interviewer affirms that he/she has explained the nature and purpose of this project. The interviewee affirms that he/she has consented to this interview.

Yes  / No

If not consenting as above: please add the interviewee names here for the department of Family Medicine information only.

Name: Monica Zeviar