

# Personal Safety Nets® e-Newsletter

The Story Behind Wellness

September 2014, Issue 72

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As we say . . .  
Be The Change You  
Want to See - VOTE!



Why let other people decide what is best for you when you can have a voice? VOTE!

You can help decide. You can vote. Even if you don't think you know enough, **VOTE** on what you do know.

We'll be holding our **BALLOT PARTY** - a simple gathering built around a potluck or snacks - where we can discuss the ballot and the issues before everyone sends them in. It's a fun, informative, and interesting way to engage others.

Check for registration and voting information on line or with your local government agency - and **let's have all our voices heard!**



## Youth in Humor

**Bruce Jay Friedman** was born in the Bronx (one of us can relate!) on April 26, 1930. He is an American novelist, screenwriter, playwright, and actor known for his humorous take on life.

## Do Wellness Programs Really Work?

Since most Americans obtain health insurance coverage through their employer, we thought it would be interesting to look at how well popular wellness programs really work.



**For various reasons, employers have found it in their best interest to try to promote a healthy, productive workforce in order to moderate health care spending. The way to this goal is often through a company wellness program.** The goal is usually to balance the organization's program costs with health results leading to large dollar savings for organizations and employers. In fact, today, wellness plans are often promoted as saving companies **\$3 or more** for every dollar invested. **Do you work in a company with a wellness program? Does this sound familiar?**

The American Medical Association's Chicago **headquarters**, started an employee wellness program in 2007. Now more of the 1,000 employees take the stairs. The company's cafeteria has expanded its nutrition labels. TVs in the building highlight wellness events. Employees can participate in daily dance, yoga, tai-chi, and other fitness classes, guest speakers appear regularly showing how to turn fresh fruits and vegetables into delicious meals. A biometric testing program measures employees' cholesterol and glucose levels. **But does it get the results that were intended?** We were unable to get exact statistics.



Effective

Not as effective

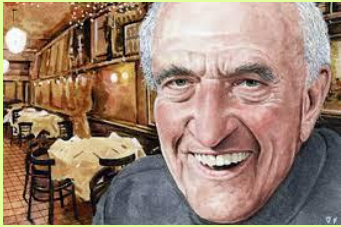
In fact, while the percentage of firms of any size offering at least one wellness program **grew** from 58 percent in 2009 to 77 percent in 2013, results are inconclusive. A recent **survey** by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Health Research & Educational Trust raises questions about the effectiveness of these wellness programs. **What aspects of these programs work, for whom, and for how long? How successful are they for employers? What questions would you have about this?**

One recent **review** of 33 workplace wellness programs in place since 2000 found that **programs generally focused on the basics of healthy living, including increasing physical activity, eating well, and losing weight.**

Some programs focused explicitly on reducing health care costs (13 percent of programs) or smoking cessation (11 percent), while others worked toward improving mental health (6 percent), and reducing alcohol consumption (5 percent).

Overall, **the findings, in regard to effectiveness of**





Friedman now considers himself a "Considerably Older Guy" and to deal with this reality, he's looking at ways to keep and expand his personal safety net. His biggest fear is to be friendless and alone and so, in his usual humorous way, he offers some tongue-in-cheek advice on keeping your friends. But inside his **advice** ("Friends to the End"), **we found some gems.**

- Don't allow little disagreements to ruin a friendship. It's okay to disagree - and remember the good times you've had together.
- It's good to give friends space to have other friends - keep from being jealous.
- Remember: a true friend is someone who will accept you the way you are - and you'll accept them the same way.
- Every "Considerably Older Guy" needs to have a "4-in-the-morning friend." "At some ungodly hour, when 911 doesn't respond, such a friend will hop out of bed and rush to be at your side." The best way to find a "4-in-the-morning friend" is to be one for someone else - would you jump out of bed?
- See if you can find some friends who are more youthful than you - their youthfulness can add to your vitality.

## Give Someone A Squeeze

A 10-second hug lowers blood pressure by increasing the feel-good hormone oxytocin and lowering the stress chemical cortisol. (AARP Magazine)

**wellness programs in terms of improving health outcomes and behaviors, are inconsistent,** with positive evidence for programs focused on smoking cessation, but insufficient or negative evidence for those focused on physical activity, eating habits, and biometric measures. **Why?**



Workplace smoking cessation **programs** had higher quit rates compared to non-participating groups. Those programs that integrating the program with occupational health lessons attracted more participants and resulted in quit rates twice as high as those for workers who participated in smoking cessation programs alone. **Was it because they did it together?**

Programs focusing on physical activity have such varied components that it's difficult to get clear evidence of their **effectiveness.** For example, over a two year period, one set of researchers **found** no significant difference in levels of physical activity for employees at schools with wellness programs compared to those at schools without programs. However, in another **study** providing fitness centers was sufficient to produce some change in sedentary employees, but **those who also received group-counseling with the exercise training consistently had greater improvements in physical activity and energy expenditure overall. They did it together!**



Many wellness programs focus on improving biometrics - such as weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels - and aim to develop healthy eating habits, with no decrease in hospital admissions or emergency room visits among participants. Still, RAND found "Well-executed programs appear to improve employee health meaningfully," the **California Health Benefits Review Program**, which advises the state's legislature, **found** that though employees' blood pressure, blood sugar or cholesterol did not improve by participating in a corporate wellness plan, **workers lost about 1 pound annually for three years. I know I'd like to lose, rather than gain this ... how about you?**



What about the effectiveness of wellness programs with regard to their return on dollars spent by employers? RAND found that **fewer than half of companies took the time to calculate** whether wellness programs saved them money. If they did, the numbers might have startled them. The study concluded that **wellness**

**programs did not significantly reduce employer health costs.** Why? Because health screenings (often part of the wellness program) generally promote more doctor visits, prescription medications or further tests. While this might benefit workers' health, **which might pay off with longer terms. In the short run,** it doesn't necessarily save money. **And some employers pass on the cost of these programs to workers by raising their insurance premiums.** So, if money saved is the metric, then no - these programs don't work.



**And what about the doctors?** While it's widely **known** that physically active people are healthier overall than people who are sedentary, and that active people are less likely to gain excess weight thus having a smaller chance of developing chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease, **doctors have not always gotten**



## Skirt Sizes & Breast Cancer

Watch your skirt size, if you wear skirts.



Researchers found that an increase of one skirt size every 10 years led to a 33 percent rise in the risk of postmenopausal breast cancer, while an increase of two sizes per decade led to a 77 percent rise in risk, according to the study in the journal **BMJ Open**.

Although other studies have looked at the impact of weight on breast cancer risk **this is the first study to look at weight gain with a measure that is easily assessed by women and their doctors.**

**that message across to patients. And they don't seem to be very good at taking the advice themselves, either!**

Although U.S. doctors are giving their adult patients more advice on exercise than they used to as we pointed out in our August newsletter, only about a third of all doctor-patient encounters in 2010 included such counseling, according to a report **published** by researchers at the CDC.

**How do you think your physician would score?**

Importantly, physically inactive doctors are more likely to **sidestep** the subject of exercise than are fit physicians, according to an international study **published** in the British Journal of Sports Medicine in 2008. The researchers found that **physically active doctors were more likely to encourage and motivate patients to do the same.** And a new study from Truven Health

British Journal of  
**SPORTS MEDICINE**

**TRUVEN**  
HEALTH ANALYTICS

Analytics, reports that hospital employees (including doctors) are less healthy than the general workforce and cost more in health care spending.



As reported in a recent **article** in the Georgia Health News, the lesson for the all of us is when it comes to wellness programs, "when doctors practice it, they're better at preaching it." **So, bring the subject up with your doctor, and see if they're practicing what they need to be preaching.**

## We get . . . LETTERS & STORIES



"Thankfulness and Praise Are Key to a Well-Integrated Life!" says Daniel Liechty.



Photo courtesy of Daniel Liechty

Liechty states, "one does not "own" one's life and identity; that one's life and identity is an unearned gift, and that the resources we have available to us are also gifts to us, not possessions we need, must hoard and defend."

## Personal Safety Nets is Happening!



Join us Tuesday, October 7, 2014 at the Senior Center of West Seattle. We'll be speaking to the Center's volunteers regarding the value of their work, how this fits into their support for a community safety net, and more.

We will give the closing plenary talk for the University of



Washington's

"Building Elder Friendly Futures - Locally and Globally" Conference. The conference is being held October 8-9, 2014 at the University of Washington's HUB in Seattle. It is open to the public (there is a fee).

On October 9, 2014, Personal Safety Nets® will again be honored to be part of the training for the ANEW program - providing an opening week seminar for a new group of women beginning their quest for new viable and satisfying non-traditional career pathways leading to family wage jobs.

**ANEW - Apprenticeship & Non-Traditional Employment for Women** - was founded in 1980 by

women dedicated to improving access and advancement in non-traditional



"Cultivation of this attitudinal awareness leads to a deep sense of generosity and humility. The implied hypothesis is that a much more satisfying life for human beings, one that is rooted in heroics compatible with our mortal nature rather than heroics struggling frantically against our mortal nature, will be **a life in which our desires and values are heavily tempered by cultivation of generosity and humility.**"

**Dr. Liechty is talking about a life that cultivates an attitude of habitual Thanks and Praise!**

**We'd love to hear from you. Share your thoughts about Dr. Liechty's ideas)**

*(Dr Daniel Liechty is Professor of Social Work and a member of the Graduate Faculty at Illinois State University).*



## **We're Always Seeking Your Story!**

Tell us how you have (or haven't) dealt with a situation by building a network **for yourself or someone close to you**, or gathering with others to solve problems.

Sharing is a wonderful thing and your story will certainly be a helpful learning tool for many others!



career paths. Since its inception, ANEW has run 70+ classes for hundreds of women. **ANEW** provides women of all ages, races, and backgrounds with quality training, support services and employment preparation.



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**On November 5, 2014, Personal Safety Nets® will be offering a support seminar to the Employee of the City of Tukwila as part of their Employee Wellness Program.**

We're always happy to be involved with "wellness" programs for all ages, knowing how helpful they can be in making lives more full and connected. We remain convinced that when employees participate together, these programs are effective. We're glad Tukwila does too.

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**On November 19, 2014, at 1:30 pm, Personal Safety Nets® will be at the Wallingford Community Senior Center to present a free seminar: Understanding and Using Your Personal Safety Net.** This follows their **Community Lunch** program.

