Lieutenant Governor's Newsletter to South Carolina's Senior Community

March 1, 2005

Helping 50,000 Seniors Quit Smoking

Another sign of Medicare's new emphasis on prevention is the announcement it will pay to help certain older smokers kick the habit. While the policy's final form will not be unveiled until later this month, the basic idea is that next year Medicare will begin covering smoking cessation counseling to beneficiaries with illnesses caused by or complicated by smoking, as well as those whose medications are affected by smoking.

This policy could help some of the 50,000 senior smokers here in South Carolina, based on estimates that smokers make up 10.1% of our 500,000 citizens who are 65 and older. Let's carry the prevention mantra one step further by doing everything we can to help all 50,000 quit. Why not persuade someone to stop smoking today, rather than waiting until tobacco use leads to an illness or a complication that triggers Medicare coverage of tobacco cessation coverage?

Let's begin by asking our physicians to counsel their senior patients who smoke. "Regardless of a smoker's age, kicking the habit will lead to immediate and long-term benefits, including lowered blood pressure, improved lung function and reduced risk for heart attack," the *American Medical News* reported Feb. 21. Although many seniors became addicted to tobacco long before smoking became a health issue, the benefits of quitting help even those who have smoked for three or four decades. *American Medical News* provided some excellent pointers by quoting Dr. Tracy Orleans, a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation senior scientist and a principal author of *Clear Horizons*, a quit-smoking guide for people older than 50. She told *American Medical News* she encourages physicians to highlight the immediate changes patients can expect, such as better sleeping and breathing and improved energy levels and circulation. Explain to them that quitting smoking is "like reversing the aging process," she advises. "Older smokers assume it is age that is slowing them down. It is usually the smoking."

The article provides strategy beyond the need for patients to talk to physicians about quitting, and for physicians to encourage patients to quit. Says the *American Medical News*: "A key part of the strategy is the five A's -- a list of steps considered the gold standard in smoking interventions: **a**sk about tobacco use, **a**dvise tobacco users to quit, **a**ssess their willingness, **a**ssist in the quit attempt and **a**rrange follow-up. …For reluctant patients, the guideline offers the five R's, each targeting motivation. Specifically, they focus the patient on why quitting is personally **r**elevant in addition to the **r**isks that accompany continued

smoking, the **r**ewards of stopping and the **r**oadblocks they might confront. Finally, **r**epetition -- these messages should be repeated during every unmotivated patient's visit."

Dr. Oscar Lovelace, the Newberry County physician who is a member of my Commission on Aging for Review and Evaluation, told the Commission recently that every dollar invested in smoking prevention leads to $60 in health care savings. Each pack costs all of us $40: That's $35 to cover the future tobacco-related health needs of the smoker, $3.50 for the spouse, and $1.50 for the community.

He called tobacco our No. 1 killer. The Department of Health and Human Services reports that 440,000 people die annually from smoking-related diseases, and 300,000 of them are 65 and older.

Encourage your senior smoker to talk to his or her physician about quitting, and tell everyone the Department of Health and Environmental Control operates South Carolina's toll-free Tobacco Quitline number, which is 1-877-44U-QUIT or 1-877-448-7848.

Life Expectancy Reaches All-Time High

Life expectancy for Americans has reached an all-time high, according to the latest U.S. mortality statistics released this week by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The report, "Deaths: Preliminary Data for 2003," shows life expectancy at 77.6 years in 2003, up from 77.3 in 2002.

The gap between male and female life expectancy closed from 5.4 years in 2002 to 5.3 years in 2003, continuing a trend toward narrowing since the peak gap of 7.8 years in 1979. Record-high life expectancies were found for white males (75.4 years) and black males (69.2 males), as well as for white females (80.5 years) and black females (76.1 years).

A baby born in 1900 could expect to live only until its 47th birthday. Babies born in this century can live past their 77th birthdays. The gift of these extra 30 years, reports *The State of Aging and Health in America 2004*, is largely due to improved medical care and prevention efforts. Not only are Americans living longer today, but they are dying from different causes. In 1900, we died from infectious diseases and acute illnesses. Today, we die from chronic diseases and degenerative illnesses. The report states: "The tragedy of the leading chronic disease killers is that they are often preventable. Although the risk of disease and disability clearly increases with age, poor health is not an inevitable consequence of aging."

Later this spring, I will be emphasizing one of the conclusions of *The State of Aging and Health in America 2004,* which is: "Adopting healthier behaviors –

regular physical activity, a healthy diet and a smoke-free lifestyle – and getting regular screenings (mammograms and colonoscopies, for example) can dramatically reduce a person's risk for many chronic diseases, including the leading causes of death and disability."

Medicare Discount Card Deadline

The deadline for applying for the full $300 credit for the Medicare Discount Drug Card for 2005 is March 15. Seniors should call the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging Insurance Counseling Assistance and Referrals for Elders (I-CARE) at 1-800-868-9095 or Medicare at 1-800-633-4227. They can also go online at www.medicare.gov to get help signing up for their Medicare Prescription Drug Discount card and the available discount credits.

ARCC Grant Application Request

March 3rd is the deadline to register for the pre-application workshop for the 2005 grant application for community grants through the South Carolina Alzheimer's Resource Coordination Center in the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging. The workshop will be held at 10 a.m. on March 10 at the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging at 1301 Gervais Street, Suite 200. The grant application is available on the website www.aging.sc.gov or may be requested from Fran Brannon at 734-9875 or toll-free 1-800-868-9095. The deadline for submission of the application is April 19. Applications are being sought from community groups to develop or expand respite care programs that are dementia specific, or educational programs for families and caregivers of persons with dementia.

2005 Photography Contest

March 14th is the deadline for senior center directors to submit photos and essays by nonprofessional photographers over 60 that express the 2005 Older Americans Month theme of "Celebrate Long-Term Living." This annual photo contest, sponsored by the Administration on Aging, promotes positive aging by capturing images of older people being physically active, being engaged in their communities through volunteering and intergenerational activities. Last year's contest drew 109 entries. Details may be found at http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/OAA_photo_contest_2005.pdf

AARP South Carolina Promotes ElderCare Trust Fund

AARP South Carolina is encouraging South Carolina tax filers to "check-off" the ElderCare Trust Fund with a voluntary contribution on their state income tax forms. The ElderCare Trust Fund was created in 1992 and contributions received from the voluntary tax check-off contribution system are used to award seed grants to public and private nonprofit agencies and organizations to establish and

administer innovative programs and activities that assist older South Carolinians to live with dignity and vitality in their communities.

“These activities will ensure and promote independence and dignity for older South Carolinians throughout their lives,” said Jane Wiley, AARP South Carolina State Director. Since its inception, the ElderCare partnership has funded over 25 grants, totaling more than $300,000 for projects that include simple home repairs for widows, transportation for medical visits, shopping, and day care, exercise and health promotion, and construction of wheel chair ramps for disabled persons in need of access to the world beyond their door.

For more information on the ElderCare Trust Fund, call 1-800-868-9095.

Community Forums Being Scheduled

More than a dozen community forums have now been scheduled throughout our state that will help us set the agenda for the South Carolina White House Conference on Aging in Myrtle Beach’s Springmaid Beach April 25-27.

- Thursday, March 3, Santee-Lynches Regional Council on Aging, Sumter, 6 p.m.
- Thursday, March 3, West Side Baptist Church, Greenwood, 9 a.m.
- Saturday, March 5, at Fennel Elementary School, Yemassee, 1 p.m.
- Wednesday, March 9, Penn Center, St. Helena Island, 1 p.m.
- Thursday, March 10, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Manning, 9 a.m.
- Monday, March 14, Gaillard Municipal Auditorium, Charleston, 9:30 a.m.
- Monday, March 14, Capital Senior Center, Columbia, 9 a.m.
- Monday, March 14, Kershaw Health Resource Center, Camden, 9 a.m.
- Wednesday, March 16, The Shepherd’s Center, Sumter, 9 a.m.
- Thursday, March 17, Bethlehem UM Church, Bishopville, 9 a.m.
- Thursday, March 17, City of Rock Hill Council Chambers, Rock Hill, 2 p.m.
- Monday, March 21, Sun City Hilton Head, Bluffton, 1 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 22, Florence Civic Center, Florence, 9 a.m.

Recommendations developed at these Community Forums will be discussed and prioritized at the state conference, and presented at the national conference in Washington in October.

For more information and for updates, please see the website of the Lt. Governor's Office on Aging, www.aging.sc.gov

Until next time, André