Beyond the Meal: The Value of Socialization in OAA Congregate Nutrition Programs

THURSDAY, JUNE 15TH 2017
2:15 – 3:30 PM
Presenters

- **Robert Blancato**
  Executive Director, NANASP

- **Meaghan McMahon, MSW**
  Director, MBM Consulting, LLC
Mission: To improve the quality of life for our nation’s older adults.

RRF is one of the first private foundations devoted exclusively to aging and retirement issues.

Headquarters in Chicago, IL

Thank you to our RRF Senior Program Officer Nancy Zweibel, Ph.D. and to our advisor Dr. Thomas Prohaska.
Goal: To study the value of socialization for older adults who participate in Congregate Nutrition programs under the OAA and how this contributes to their health and well-being outcomes while potentially saving Medicaid and Medicare funds. The findings will be used to influence future policy decisions on the OAA and possibly other legislation.

Past research has focused on the meal that is provided as well as nutrition education.

Little evaluation, if any, has ever been done solely on the benefits of socialization in Congregate Nutrition programs to the health and well-being of older adults.
OAA Amendments of 2006
P.L. 109-365

- Added a new purpose statement for the Nutrition Services Program (OAA Title III C)

- The three purposes of the programs as stipulated in the law are to
  - (1) Reduce hunger and food insecurity,
  - (2) **Promote socialization of older individuals**, and
  - (3) Promote the health and well-being outcomes of older individuals by assisting them to access nutrition and other disease prevention and health promotion services to delay the onset of adverse health conditions resulting from poor nutritional health or sedentary behavior
Socialization in News and Research

- “Easing Old People’s Loneliness Can Help Keep Them Healthy” (January 2017, NPR)

- “Loneliness: A Growing Health Threat for Older Adults” (December 2016, Next Avenue)

- “Researchers Confront an Epidemic of Loneliness” (September 2016, NYT)

- “Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality” (March 2015, Perspectives on Psychological Science, Julianne Holt-Lunstad)

- “Loneliness in Older Persons: A Predictor of Functional Decline and Death” (July 2012, JAMA, Carla Perissinotto, MD, MHS)
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>May, 2016</td>
<td>RRF approves NANASP grant proposal for $20,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>July, 2016</td>
<td>Literature Review on Nutrition and Socialization for Older Adults Completed</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1 - March 1, 2017</td>
<td>Survey Tool Dissemination and Data Collection/Processing</td>
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<td>February 21, 2017</td>
<td>Preliminary Results Webinar to NANASP Membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>March 1 – May 1, 2017</td>
<td>Full Data Analysis of Survey Results</td>
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<td>July 2017</td>
<td>Final Report Due to RRF</td>
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NANASP Survey Tool

- Provider Focused Questions (14 total)
- Participant Focused Questions (9 total)
- Initial Survey Limitations:
  - There was no question on respondent gender
  - The tool was not translated into Spanish
  - Too many open-ended questions
Participant Survey Questions

- What do you like best about socializing during the congregate meal program?
- How do you arrive at the congregate meal site?
- How frequently do you receive meals at the congregate meal site?
- Since participating in the program, has your knowledge of good nutrition and healthy eating habits increased?
- Since participating in the program, are you exercising more? Are you eating well balanced meals at home?
- Has your physical health improved since you started visiting the congregate meal site?
- Have you made fewer visits to your doctor since you started visiting the congregate meal site?
- Do you have more friends now than before you started visiting the site?
- Do you believe enough time is allowed for socialization? Is it encouraged?
Survey Participants

- **WellMed** (Texas – 3 sites total)
- **Area Agency on Aging 3** (Ohio)
- **Wood County Committee on Aging** (Ohio)
- **Missoula Aging Services** (Montana)
- **Litchfield Hills Elderly Nutrition Program** (Connecticut)
- **Senior Services of Snohomish County** (Washington)
- **CAC Office on Aging** (Tennessee)
- **REAL Services, Inc.** (Indiana)
- **Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging** (Ohio)
- **Senior Resources of Guilford** (North Carolina)
- **Meals on Wheels and Senior Outreach Services** (California)
- **Meals on Wheels Fairfield County** (Ohio)
- **AgeOptions** (Illinois)
- **New Opportunities Inc.** (Connecticut)
- **Senior Serv** (California)
Survey Participants
Final Survey Results

- Surveys sent to NANASP Congregate Meal Sites in the following states:
  - Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington

- 2,305 Participant Focused Surveys

- 57 Provider Focused Surveys
Socialization Data Results

- 2,029 of program participants said socialization at the site is encouraged (88%) 
- 1,837 participants said they have more friends now than before visiting site (80%) 
- 1,365 participants said their physical health has improved since visiting the site (59%) 
- 1,369 participants said they use their car to arrive at the site (59%) 
- 1,064 participants said they attend the site almost every day (46%) 
- 545 participants said they “Like meeting new friends/talking with different people each day” (24%)
Survey Participant Comments

- “I just enjoy getting out and making new friends”
- “If not for the senior center I would be very lonely. It’s a blessing for people like me”
- “I’m exercising more and walking more”
- “I come for the people as much as the food”
- “I’ve stopped eating snacks all day and lost weight”
- “It is unbelievable how much we benefit and learn. It is so motivational”
- “I love seeing and participating, singing and listening to music on Thursdays”
- “Wish it was opened Saturday and Sunday”
Case Study:

- Headquarters: Anaheim, California
- 19 Congregate Nutrition Program Sites Participated
- 615 Participant Surveys
- 9 Provider Surveys
- Staff translated our Survey Tool to Spanish

**GENDER**

- 55%
- 30%
- 15%
- Male
- Female
- No Answer
Case Study:

Question 3: How frequently do you receive meals at the congregate meal site?

- Once a month: 50
- Few times a month: 100
- Few times a week: 200
- Almost every day: 250
- Other: 5

Question 8: Do you have more friends now than before you started visiting the site?

- Yes: 93%
- No: 5%
- Other: 2%
Question 9: Do you believe enough time is allowed for socialization? Is it encouraged?

- Sampling of comments from participants:
  "Without this site, I would be sitting at home alone..."
  "Best thing that ever happened to me since I lost my wife."
  "Since coming here, I have made many wonderful friends and if not for the senior center I would be very lonely."
  "The senior center for me is a life saver. My late wife Carol is here but only in spirit."
Provider Survey Results

- How long have you been in your position? **Range: 8 months to 30+ years**
- What is the average age of your participants? **Range: 60 to 96 years old**
- Main issues faced by program participants? **Transportation, Physical Health & Housing**
- Why do participants use your congregate meal program? **70% said all of the above** (including Meal, Nutrition Education, Socialization and Physical Activities/Exercise)
- What is the average length of time a participant has been in your program? **40% said 5-10 years**
Provider Comments on Socialization

- “Very important. It uplifts their spirits, brings laughter, and I think gives them reasons to get up out of bed.”
- “I feel that socialization is just as important as the hot nutritious meal they receive. Without the sites they might go all day without leaving their apartment or seeing anyone.”
- “I think it is extremely important. This is how they keep from feeling isolated.”
- “Socialization is very important in seniors' lives. Most of them live alone.”
In-Person Site Visits

- **Aging & In-Home Services of Northeast Indiana**
  - Area III Agency on Aging for the State of Indiana
  - Nine county service area
  - Visit to La Fountaine Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana (September 7, 2016)
  - Participants have been visiting site anywhere from 3 – 14 years total
  - Majority of participants were women who live alone
Meals on Wheels and Senior Outreach Services

Walnut Creek, California

For more than 40 years has served more than 5,000 seniors annually in Contra Costa County

12 older adults participated in site visit from Bob at the Concord Community Café dining room

A couple of participants had been in program 20+ years

Participants said they come for the people, staff and food
Benjamin Rose Institute on Aging and Wood County Committee on Aging, Inc.

- 2 site locations: East Cleveland and Bowling Green, Ohio
- March 2017
- Group of 15 participants for Cleveland site visit and 40 participants for Bowling Green
- At least 5 people from Bowling Green have been coming to site for 15+ years
- Sentinel- Tribune News Press Coverage of visit

DC researcher examines BG senior center as grant model
By BILL RYAN, Sentinel-Tribune Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, March 10, 2017 9:03 am

Robert “Bob” Blancato is not your average Washington executive, he is an advocate for senior causes.

He visited the Bowling Green Senior Center last week as part of grant research into the value of congregate dining for help make a case for increased federal and other governmental funding, stressing the importance of the meals for the

Beyond just the nutrition of the meals, research looks into the benefits of gathering together over food — primarily activities provided through the Wood County Committee on Aging.

Blancato is the executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs based in the

“...the services can provide meals, but often the value of socialization and need for interaction is overlooked,” he said...
WellMed Medical Management, Inc.

- San Antonio, Texas (3 sites total)
- Over 100 seniors total participated in this visit in April 2017
- Majority of participants were female, with ages ranging from 60s to 80s
- Three reasons mentioned consistently for attending site:
  - Socialization on daily basis
  - Getting out of house or apartment
  - The variety of activities