

Nursing

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provides blood pressure checks after Masses at St. Augustine, St. Monica's and Our Lady of Good Counsel churches.

"Our function is to ensure health, not merely the absence of disease," she said, however.

The ministry handles Meals on Wheels and prescription deliveries, as well, Lowe said. And it has helped teach Sunday School children about foods and provided nutrition leaflets for them to take home to their parents.

In Webster, St. Rita parishioner Felice Armignacco, RN, has been chairing a parish health ministry for the past few years at the parish. She had retired in 1991 after 30 years with the Monroe County Health Department where she'd become director of nursing services. But she was quick to see the benefits of parish programs when discussions began at the Mercy Center a few years ago.

"I was really interested when I heard about it," she said, explaining she'd heard about parish nursing through her work for the Mercy Center. She is on the board and also on the health network steering committee.

"I think it's a good idea. There are a lot of needs in parishes that sometimes are hidden. You don't know about everybody who may be able to benefit by having this contact, and people wanting to learn a lot about health care, taking a greater role in managing it and working with doctors."

Especially with hospitals discharging patients sooner than in the past, Armi-

gnacco noted, "This is where needs become more apparent. They (parishioners) need to know what they can call on and how to get help."

St. Rita's ministry also has presented programs on anything from arthritis and exercise, in conjunction with St. Rita's Society, to stress management, featuring a St. John Fisher College nursing department member. In a recent survey of St. Rita parishioners' health interests, stress management, mental health, heart, medications and nutrition topped the list.

At St. Salome's, the parish health ministry has issued bulletin articles with summer tips — treating cuts and insect bites, drinking water and eating right during summer, for instance, according to Patricia Gellner, RN, a Health Ministry Network member and a parish nurse for St. Salome's.

Gellner, also a 30-year nurse and an advanced practice nurse with Visiting Nurse Service, said the information may seem basic, but she is asked questions about such matters in her VNS work, no matter the client's background or income.

The idea is to focus on wellness, she said, although details for the parish ministry remain to be worked out.

"I'm sure we will talk about blood pressure, diet and weight," she said. "Sometimes people hear more readily from someone in their closer community network."

Meanwhile, she said, "The Mercy Center is certainly a tremendous resource for us. ... I can bring back lot ideas from more established parish health ministries."

Mercy also provides literature, she

said. And the network is "a very diverse group, both from a religious standpoint, but health standpoint — hospitals, community agencies. It offers lot resources right there," Gellner said.

Parish nursing has become a nursing discipline that people only gradually are becoming aware of, Doty commented.

"Its time has come," she said, adding churches need to recognize the commitment parish nurses make to their congregations and to compensate them. She is believed to be the area's only paid parish nurse, although at what she calls a "semi-volunteer rate."

She and others in the network noted the Rev. Granger Westberg is credited with making parish nursing what it is today, having developed a partnership between Lutheran General Health System in Park Ridge, Ill., in 1984 with six local congregations — Catholic, Lutheran and Methodist. Today the International Parish Nurse Resource Center is located at that hospital.

While parish nursing is just beginning at St. Salome's, Father William Darling, pastor, said the ministry has held two blood pressure screenings after Sunday Masses in April and May.

"It seems to be an enthusiastic group," he said.

He has taken advantage of the blood pressure screening, he noted, but now realizes "right after liturgy may not be the best time. It was a little high."

He foresees parishioners seeking out parish nurses for a variety of needs, whether health, emotional, spiritual, a home visit, or help with insurance forms.

"There are a lot of possibilities," Father Darling said.

Officials affirm Viagra validity

ALBANY (CNS) — It's the little blue pill everybody's talking about, and Catholics shouldn't be red-faced if they want to try it.

That's the consensus among several Catholic experts regarding Viagra, the drug that may answer the prayers of clinically impotent men.

Taking the pill is perfectly acceptable within the context of a married relationship, experts said.

"Any pathological situation can and should be cured either by surgical intervention or drugs," said John Dwyer, professor for St. Bernard's Institute in the Albany Diocese, speaking with *The Evangelist*, the diocesan newspaper.

Mary Moriarty, associate director of the Albany diocesan Family Life Office, said that while Viagra doesn't deal with all the factors leading to impotence, if both married partners are willing to renew their sexual relationship, there are no moral obstacles to experimenting with Viagra.

"Our sexual life is God-given, and I don't think God says you have to stop at 55, 65 or 75," she said.

Franciscan Father Edgar Holden, whose "Bits & Bites" column appears in *The Evangelist*, agreed that a married man should feel free to take Viagra if his physician prescribes it.

"I wouldn't hesitate, because impotence would render a marriage invalid anyway," he said. "God gave us sex to be used. If it can be aided and abetted by legitimate, valid medical means, go for it."

"For those it brings happiness to, I think it's a blessing," he said.

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