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Two Nonprofits Partner to Expand Meal Delivery Program

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Satellite Healthcare grant expands Renal Meals on Wheels to patients under 60

Sonoma County Chronic Kidney Disease patients under 60 years of age, thanks to Satellite Healthcare's 40 Points of Light Community Project Grant, can now get kidney-friendly meals delivered through the "One Meal at a Time" project, a partnership between the Council on Aging's Meals on Wheels and Satellite Healthcare, Inc. The "40 Points of Light" is a reference to the nonprofit's 40 year anniversary, which it is celebrating this year.

The Council on Aging Meals on Wheels program has been preparing and delivering meals to homebound Sonoma County seniors since 1976. Seniors (60 and older) who are homebound, or unable to shop and cook for themselves, are eligible, regardless of income. The cost to the patient for the program is a donation of \$4/meal, although there are subsidies, and the organization will take whatever the patient can afford.

Margaret Farr, 68, Santa Rosa, said she hopes to give the organization a little more when she can afford it. A current Satellite hemodialysis patient, she also hopes to go back to peritoneum dialysis, which is self-administered at home, and eventually come volunteer for Meals on Wheels.

Several years ago, through a partnership with Satellite Healthcare, Inc., Meals on Wheels added a renal program for Chronic Kidney Disease patients over 60. Meals on Wheels government funding comes under the Older American's Act, according to Jane Doroff, Dietician for Satellite Healthcare, so the funding only covers patients 60 and older.

Doroff, who had been with Meals on Wheels in 2008, embarked on the application and approval process more than a year ago, to provide renal diet meal support for Sonoma County Chronic Kidney Disease patients of all ages. The dialysis patients she sees at Satellite Healthcare's Santa Rosa office currently range in age from 25 to 98. County-wide, the organization serves 30 patients, which includes its Rohnert Park and Windsor clinics.

Chronic kidney disease includes any condition that damages the kidneys and impairs their function. The kidneys filter out toxins from the body. The damage can be gradual, over a long period of time, but when it gets worse, wastes can build to high levels in the blood,

which makes the sufferer feel sick. It can also lead to high blood pressure, anemia, weak bones, malnutrition, nerve damage and increased risk of heart and blood vessel disease.

The two most common causes of Chronic Kidney Disease are hypertension (high blood pressure) and diabetes. There is also a genetic condition, polycystic kidney disease, which presents with multiple cysts on the kidneys, which hamper its function.

Individuals needing low-sodium, heart-healthy or gluten free choices, can cruise the freezer aisles at supermarkets and find prepared meals which cater to these restrictions. The renal diet is much more specific, and requires patients to do more cooking from scratch – something they often do not have the energy to do after dialysis.

According to the National Kidney Foundation, patients on hemodialysis should eat plenty of high-protein foods and avoid foods containing large amounts of salt, potassium and phosphorus. Even the amount of liquids patients may consume is restricted.

Doroff said the renal diet is complicated, especially with the potassium. Beans are high in potassium, and therefore not in a kidney friendly diet, which is a tough sell, she said, for her Hispanic patients. Other foods patients need to avoid are prepared foods, as these can be high in salt- or phosphorous-based additives. Patients have to read labels carefully, or stick to the outer perimeter of the supermarket, away from the canned and frozen foods, added Doroff.

After having to leave his job because of his chronic kidney disease, Robert Thomas, 41, Santa Rosa, mentioned to Doroff that he guessed he'd be eating beans and rice. That's when she told him about the program, and he has been on it since the early part of this year. He had been doing all of his own shopping and cooking prior to that. He said it was really hard. "I had to go to several different places to get the things I need, because a lot of stores don't cater to people on dialysis."

Thomas enjoys the meals. Some are dryer than others, he said, but added that that is because of the dietary requirements, which include limiting liquids. He said the meat is chicken and turkey because red meats are harder for the kidneys to process. "In steak, the molecules are bigger and the kidneys have a harder time breaking those down."

Ezau Ruiz, 29, Santa Rosa, found about the meal program from Doroff and his Satellite social worker and has been receiving them for a year. "I like it because it's already prepared and all you have to do is microwave it," he said. "After dialysis you're drained and tired, and then cooking is too much." His meals are delivered to his door every Wednesday. Ruiz said the meals are tasty. He only wishes he could get the turkey and gravy and spaghetti dinners more often.

"I think it's a really great program," added Ruiz. "It's a big help. I really appreciate it a lot."