

June 19, 2015

Senate Finance Committee Chronic care Workgroup
US Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senators Hatch, Wyden, Isakson and Warner,

I first attended a Chronic Disease Self-Management workshop in March 2014. I was a skeptic, but because of grant funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to Aligning Forces Humboldt (under the umbrella of the California Center for Rural Policy and Humboldt State University) the cost of attending was free, so I figured there must be something I could get out of 15 hours of instruction coming from Stanford University and certified leaders. I asked how my concerns regarding my advancing arthritis could be addressed in a group of non-medical people. I attended the first two workshop sessions, 2.5 hours each, when I realized that the information from Stanford was simple and useful, but the gathering of other folks who suffered from all sorts of other chronic conditions was equally a key component to the huge benefits I gained from the entire workshop series. Both the information and the gathering together and empowering individuals to take charge and responsibility of our own health were valuable!

Most people who attended were either referred by their physicians or saw a flyer at their doctor's office or pharmacy; some heard from friends. People in my group had everything from arthritis to chronic pain to one gal sharing that she had multiple conditions and had not gone out of her house for 10 years! Stanford has put together a remarkably simple-seeming curriculum with powerful tools to make us feel we can make a difference in our own health. No one in my group seemed to want to stay where they were, they all voiced a desire to get healthier. Many shared that even though they had decent relationships with their doctors, they knew the doctors could not fix them. Gaining tools that we could do every day for ourselves was something we joyfully shared. We believe that in partnership with our medical providers we can be healthier . . . but we need to learn how to help ourselves. The Chronic Disease Self-Management Program is a great starting place!

I don't believe nearly as many people would get into the workshops if they had to pay for them. The seven year Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding has run out in Humboldt County. We need to find ways to keep this precious resource going for regular people to engage more actively in their daily health, and your work with Medicare funding could just be the piece needed. Please support Medicare funding for the Stanford Chronic Disease Self-Management Program.

Thank you for your consideration in this truly urgent matter.
Judy Sears