

HEALTH

Older patients with special needs are high priority at FSU SeniorHealth

Mark Ryan Guest columnist

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A small gain – or small loss – is worth celebrating at Florida State University SeniorHealth in Tallahassee.

“It looks like you’ve lost some weight since the last appointment,” said Dr. Savitri Ramdial to the patient. The geriatrician and medical student working with her announced the positive development as they reviewed notes from the man’s last visit to the clinic.

“How much?” the man asked.

“Two pounds,” said the medical student.

“Only two pounds?” the man said, shaking his head.

Two pounds in four months? He was disappointed.

The patient had been proudly talking about how – despite occasional nagging joint pain – he had faithfully followed a personal weight-reduction regimen that included jogging 20 of the 23 days prior to the day of the appointment.

Dr. Ramdial complemented the man on the jogging initiative – but also stressed that walking could be just as beneficial as jogging. She pointed out some of the advantages of walking, including it being easier on the joints. She also talked about routine follow-up matters such as lab results, blood pressure trends, medications – and the importance of healthy eating habits.

That latter topic, when introduced by Dr. Ramdial, prompted some guilt on the part of the man. He realized that he probably had been more consistent with an eating-at-night regimen – maybe all 23 of the 23 previous days prior to the appointment – than with the daily jogging routine.

Dr. Ramdial and FSU SeniorHealth colleagues place a high priority on improving the self-management skills of older adult patients. For this case, however, it would be a big challenge convincing this patient to cut back on the late-night consumption of pizza and chicken wings.

Health-wise, except for being overweight, the man had basically been lucky in managing to dodge serious medical concerns faced by so many others being treated in the clinic.

FSU SeniorHealth providers' work in conjunction with primary care providers includes conducting comprehensive evaluations and developing integrated care plans for seniors diagnosed with cardiac problems, pulmonary problems, cancer diagnoses, chronic kidney disease, and a myriad of orthopedic issues.

Patients often arrive for their appointments in wheelchairs or using a rollator.

Given the man's failure to progress with weight reduction over a long period, it might be best for the short-term goals in his care plan to be realistically attainable. (Would recommending the 10-piece chicken-wing order instead of the 20-piece selection off the menu be too lenient for a starting point?)

Dr. Ramdial and the medical student were as positive as could be throughout the man's routine medical appointment.

The patient and medical staff are hoping to celebrate a bigger loss at his next FSU SeniorHealth appointment in September.

Mark Ryan is a Tallahassee RN and a member of Premier Health and Fitness Center.

About FSU SeniorHealth

FSU SeniorHealth geriatricians teach at FSU's School of Medicine. The program has two locations, one being on the grounds of Westminster Oaks. Interested persons age 65 and over need to fill out a new patient registration form that can be found on the program website: med.fsu.edu/fsuseniorhealth. There currently is a wait list. For more information, call 850-645-5050.