

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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News of *Hamaspik Agencies and General Health*



With a Pen's Stroke, Gov. Cuomo Signs Financial Freedom for People with Disabilities into Law

Historic Day Across State, Nation as New York Becomes Latest State to Ratify ABLE Act

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who has made disability issues a key part of his agenda, signed New York State's ABLE Act into law on Wednesday, December 23—ushering in the beginning of financial liberation for thousands of New Yorkers with disabilities.

The bill in question was the statewide version of a measure signed into law by President Barack Obama in late December, 2014.

That measure, the Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act, became U.S. law after years of advocacy by individuals and groups alike. It allows people with disabilities to save up to \$100,000 in the bank without losing their Social Security benefits.

Until the law's advent, people with such special needs could not retain more than \$2,000 in the bank and still obtain the federal benefits of Social Security. The law strikes that limit from the federal tax code.

For decades, individuals with disabilities receiving benefits from the federal Social Security

Administration (SSA) essentially were forced to remain poor and/or unemployed so as not to forfeit their vital SSA benefits.

Upon its signing by President Obama December 19, 2014, the new law was met with outright jubilation by activists nationwide—originally conceived by U.S. Rep. Ander Crenshaw (R-Fl.) in 2006 and introduced on Capitol Hill by Sen. Bob Casey (D-Pa.) in 2009, the bill had stagnated in Washington for years.

States swiftly followed suit, with the national law granting them the ability to implement ABLE legislation in their own states for signing by their governors.

In the Empire State, for example, State Sen. David Carlucci (D-38th Dist.) long advocated for the state's passage of the ABLE bill he originally sponsored in March of 2015. That bill was passed unanimously by the State Senate in June of that year.

Some six months later, it has now been signed by Gov. Cuomo. It goes into effect in April of 2016.

The Act introduces several fundamental changes.

Firstly, by rewriting the federal tax code, it abolishes the \$2,000 total asset limit for individuals receiving Social Security disability benefits, allowing them to save up to \$2,000 a month and \$14,000 a year for a total of \$100,000 per account. It creates new tax-exempt bank accounts similar to the "527" college-saving accounts where those savings are to be deposited. (Contributions made to the account by the account holder, beneficiary, family or friends are not tax-deductible, though.)

The law specifies precisely what "qualified disability expenses" the ABLE accounts will be allowed to cover, including education, healthcare, transportation and housing. It allows any individual to open such an account, provided they have met the federal definition of "disability" before age 26.

However, as mentioned, saved

Continued on Page E2

"When there's a Will, there's a Way": Spacious New HamaspikCare Borough Park Satellite Office Officially Opens

Additional Downstate Offices to Expand Local Community Access, Services



SIGN OF THE TIMES Downstate Director Mordechai Wolhendler (l) and Outreach Director Ben Kolman (r) informing the community of HamaspikCare's newest location

On Wednesday, January 6, with dozens of staff in attendance, HamaspikCare's Brooklyn-based downstate regional offices officially dedicated its newest local community office complex. The spacious and state-of-the-art office center is located

at 4013 15th Avenue in the heart of the Borough Park neighborhood.

HamaspikCare's downstate office serves all five boroughs of New York City and beyond.

Continued on Page E6

Hamaspik's New Long Island Office Builds on Agency's Years of Service to Region

Driven Hamaspik Employee Drives Expansion of Services to Five Towns, Queens, Beyond

On December 21, 2015, Hamaspik made history again—as Hamaspik of Kings County officially opened a local branch office in Far Rockaway, taking its existing services and supports to the communities of Long Island and Queens to

the next big level.

While Hamaspik of Kings County has been helping people in Long Island and Queens from Brooklyn for years now, the new branch location will bring Hamaspik's wide and ever-growing

range of services and supports to an ever-growing community base of people in need.

Among the communities targeted by Hamaspik for outreach with its superlative brand of caring, compassion and competence are the numerous neighborhoods of Queens, the well-established "Five Towns" of Long Island (Cedarhurst, Hewlett, Inwood, Lawrence and Woodmere), and Far Rockaway itself.

Heading up the new office is Hamaspik of Kings County's very own Mrs. Julie Bergmann.

Getting started

Hamaspik of Kings County's Long Island saga began in May of 2009, when the agency secured approval to provide Nursing Home

Transition and Diversion (NHTD) services on Long Island.

That self-explanatory niche program provides services and supports to people transitioning back home from stints at nursing homes, or allows them to be diverted from hospitals straight to their homes, not into nursing homes.

Among the many services provided by NHTD is environmental modifications (e-mods), or home accessibility renovations.

The NHTD program is run under the auspices of the New York State Dept. of Health (DOH). The DOH contracts with nine regional non-profits statewide to administer the NHTD program; these non-profits are dubbed Regional Resource

Continued on Page E4

INSIDE

Diabetes Nasal Spray on the Way — E2

*

Hamaspik's First Shabbos for Kids — E3

*

Energy Exec Finds HamaspikCare — E5

*

All About... Colitis — E8

*

Giving the Siyum a New Spin — E9

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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O P W D D

Community Habilitation

Providing: Personal worker to achieve daily living skill goals

Home Based Respite

Providing: Relief for parents of special needs individuals

After School Respite

Providing: A program for after school hours and school vacations

Supplemental Day Hab Program

Providing: an extended day program

Camp Neshomah Summer Day Program

Providing: A day program during summer and winter school breaks

Individual Residential Alternative

Providing: A supervised residence for individuals who need out-of-home placement

Individual Support Services

Providing: Apartments and support for individuals who can live independently

Family Support Services

Providing: Reimbursement for out of ordinary expenses for items or services not covered by Medicaid

Day Habilitation

Providing: a Day program for adults with special needs

D O H

Traumatic Brain Injury

Providing: Service Coordination - Independent living skills training - Day programs - Rent subsidy - Medical equipment - E.Mods - Transportation - Community transit services - Home community support services

Early Intervention

Providing: Multidisciplinary and supplemental Evaluations - Home and community based services - Center based services - Parent/child groups - Ongoing service coordination - Physical therapy - Occupational therapy - Speech therapy - Special education - Nutrition - Social work - Family training - Vision services - Bilingual providers - Play therapy - Family counseling

LHCSA - HamaspiKare

Personal Care & Support Services

Providing: Home Health Aides - Homemakers - Personal Care Aides - Housekeepers - HCSS aides

Counseling Services

Providing: Dietician/Nutrition counselors - Social Workers

Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Physical therapy - Speech therapy - Occupational therapy - Individuals

PACE-CDPAP

Providing: Personal aides for people in need

HamaspiK CHOICE

A Managed Long Term Care Plan (MLTCP) approved by New York State

HCR

Access To Home

Providing: Home modifications for people with physical disabilities

RESTORE

Providing: Emergency house repairs for senior citizens

NYSED

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Providing: Employment planning - Job development - Job placement

NYSHA

Training

Providing: SCIP - CPR & first aid - Orientation - MSC CORE - AMAP - Annual Updates - Com-Hab/Respite - Family Care training - Supportive Employment

Central Intake

Providing: The first contact for a person or family in need of HamaspiK services

Article 16 Clinic

Providing: Physical therapy - Occupational therapy - Speech therapy - Psychology - Social work - Psychiatry - Nursing - Nutrition

Environmental Modification

Providing: Home modifications for special needs individuals

Supported Employment

Providing: support and coaching for individuals with disabilities to be employed and maintain employment

Enhanced Supported Employment

Providing: Job developing and coaching for people with any type of disability

Medicaid Service Coordination

Providing: An advocate for the individual to coordinate available benefits

Home Family Care

Providing: A family to care for an individual with special needs

Intermediate Care Facility

Providing: A facility for individuals who are medically involved and developmentally delayed

IBS

Providing: Intensive Behavior Services

Plan of Care

Providing: Support for the families of individuals with special needs

Care At Home

Providing: Nursing - Personal care aide - Therapy - Respite - Medical supplies - Adaptive technology - Service coordination

Nursing Home Transition and Diversion

Providing: Service Coordination - Assistive technology - Moving assistance - Community transitional services - Home community support services - E.Mods - Independent living skills - Positive behavioral interventions - Structured day program

Child & Adult Care Food Program

Providing: Breakfast - Lunch - Supper - Snack

Social and Environmental Supports

Providing: Minor maintenance for qualified

Social Model

Providing: A social day program for senior patients

Nursing Services

Providing: Skilled observation and assessment - Care planning - paraprofessional supervision - clinical monitoring and coordination - Medication management - physician-ordered nursing intervention and skill treatments

Cuomo Signs ABE Act

Continued from cover

funds cannot

be withdrawn to pay for just any old thing—the law allows them to be used for only certain costs.

It also establishes that beneficiaries will be able to retain any Medicaid benefits should they open and maintain ABE accounts.

Anyone with a disability who is a legally independent adult can open an ABE account—meaning, age 18 or older. Individuals with disabilities under 18, or those of any age whose disabilities preclude

decision-making independence, will need a legal guardian to open an ABE account.

However, in all cases, the disability must have been there at age 26 or earlier—regardless of the individual's current age.

Until now, New Yorkers with disabilities and their loved ones had to choose between losing their vital lifeline of Social Security disability benefits and saving up for a better future.

With Governor Andrew Cuomo's signature of the New York State's ABE Act, now they can have both. ■

Developing Nasal Spray for Diabetic Low Blood Sugar: Fast, Easy

People with diabetes who lose energy or even pass out from severe cases of hypoglycemia, or drops in blood sugar, are typically treated with glucagon, a sugar-boosting hormone.

But glucagon powder needs to be first mixed with water and then injected via needle directly into muscle—a process that diabetics may be unable to complete alone in emergency situations.

(Hypoglycemia cases that are mild to moderate, by contrast, are typically treated by consuming sugar content like orange juice or candy.)

Under development now, though, is a new glucagon nasal spray that worked in a clinical trial almost as well as injections. Needing no initial mixing, the spray is absorbed by the nasal passages' mucous membranes.

The clinical trial, whose results were published Dec. 17 in *Diabetes Care*, had 75 U.S. adults with Type 1 diabetes, average age 33, undergo induced hypoglycemia twice.

Participants were treated once with the standard glucagon injection, and once with the new glucagon nasal spray.

Results indicated that the nasal spray took an average of 16 minutes to suitably

raise blood sugar levels, while the shot took an average of 13.

Conversely, an earlier study found that the nasal spray took 16 to 26 seconds to administer, while the shot took 1.9 to 2.4 minutes.

The trial concluded that the injections were 100-percent effective and the nasal spray nearly as good, with a 99-percent effectiveness rate.

Because the nasal spray is almost as effective but much easier to self-administer by diabetics stricken with severe hypoglycemia, it could become the new standard, said Dr. George Grunberger, a clinical professor at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit and president of the American Association of Clinical Endocrinologists.

Indeed, pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly, which purchased global rights for the new spray from original developer Locemia Solutions, plans to bring it to market. No word on when that will be, though.

In the meantime, the only concern about the trial remains the participants' relative youth, in contrast to seniors 80 and over who are twice likelier to land in ERs for hypoglycemia. ■

“Victorian” diseases growing globally

Dread diseases that were the scourge of the masses in the Victorian era of England and elsewhere are making an ominous comeback. These include scarlet fever, tuberculosis (TB), cholera, measles, whooping cough and even scurvy.

In England alone, for example, the number of people being treated for scarlet fever has increased by 136 percent in the last five years, the UPI news agency recently reported. Cholera has jumped up by 300 percent and scurvy, the bane of British sailors of old, is up 38 percent.

The increase is being blamed on decreased access to health care and reduced vaccinations.

In related news, Mexico, the Philippines and most recently, Brazil, approved the French-made Dengvaxia, the world's first vaccine for the painful flu-like disease of dengue fever.

Dengue has been surging worldwide. In 2015, Brazil alone reported 1.4 million cases, while the U.S. is contending with an outbreak of some 180 cases in Hawaii. The FDA has yet to comment. ■

Exhilarating Exclusive Hamaspik Shabbaton for Kids Gives Parents Life-boosting Weekend of Relief, Rejuvenation

Mothers, Fathers Enjoy Critical Shabbos Break While Children Cared for, Entertained at Raleigh Hotel

Hamaspik of Rockland County, a premier non-profit agency providing human services and supports to the frum community of greater New York since 1986, outdid itself yet again this past Shabbos Parshas Vayechi—by hosting its first Shabbaton for the precious little girls and boys who regularly attend its After-school Respite and At-home Respite programs.

The sleepaway Shabbaton was held at the upstate Raleigh Hotel, a popular community destination.

The Respite programs, as their names indicate, provide parents of children with special needs with much needed daily breaks, either at designated sites to which children are transported after school before coming home, or in their homes themselves. Caring and professionally trained Hamaspik staff arrive each day to spend quality time with their charges, providing them with stimulating and therapeutic activities and games that work the mind, body, heart and soul alike.

For one Shabbos, though, Hamaspik would be providing its precious “Respite children” with a totally different kind of program.

And, by extension, it would be providing their parents with the one thing they need most after support for their children: Support for themselves.

A well-earned vacation

From the moment their beautiful children were dropped off at the parking lot of the Wal-Mart in Suffern before noon on Friday, December 25, and all the way through the moment they scooped them up in their arms the early after-

noon of Sunday, December 27, those parents were on Cloud Nine.

One devoted mother spoke for many when she later informed Hamaspik that the Shabbaton had been the first time her daughter had ever been away from the house for a single night, never mind two.

One can only imagine the relief experienced by such parents: A Shabbos on which they could focus on themselves.

Considering the constant nisyaron that is raising and caring for a child with special needs, it is only understandable that some parents took the golden opportunity to put up their other precious children with relatives. This allowed them to spend a weekend at home, or away from home, alone with no one but each other.

However, others used the 48-hour breathing space to spend precious time with their other children; not infrequently, due to the involvement demanded by children with special needs, other members of a family are overlooked, or at least feel so.

Regardless, by the time the Shabbaton was over, these heroic parents were tired and worn-out mothers and fathers no more.

Getting started, Hamaspik style

By 11:45 a.m., the children had been dropped off by their parents, and two large buses were being loaded with luggage—and with several dozen bouncing kids and their staff, who kept a watchful eye on each at a general one-to-

one ratio throughout the event. (A few of the most involved children required two staff members each, while some of the highest-functioning attendees were assigned one staff member per pair.)

At around 12:00 p.m., with mothers and fathers having said their goodbyes and buses loaded, the entourage headed out to the highway. Destination? Upstate—and a Shabbos weekend filled with inspiration and far more than a little bit of fun.

About two hours later, a cheer went up as the buses pulled into the parking lot of the Raleigh Hotel.

Waiting for the kids was Hamaspik’s Mrs. Brenda Katina, the veteran Special Events Coordinator who had once again pulled off another agency spectacular.

Accompanying her was Hamaspik of Rockland County After-school Respite (ASR) Director Mrs. Raizy Landau. Mrs. Landau, a familiar face to many of the children excitedly riding the buses due to her year-round ASR involvement, had been instrumental in recruiting staff for the special weekend event.

Mrs. Katina and staff had set up the lobby of the hotel with a “greeting program” that was classic Hamaspik. One table, behind which stood Mrs. Katina and her trademark beaming smile, was covered in custom-printed colorful hooded jackets, each boldly emblazoned with the distinct Hamaspik logo. They also each received delightful welcome packages.



AIR OF EXCITEMENT As a young Shabbaton guest (r) is led by staff to his room, a balloon artist is busy preparing delightful welcome gifts for the little arrivals

And if that wasn’t exciting enough, off to one side was a giant inflatable ball pit. The kids lost no time literally diving right in.

But Special Events Coordinator Katina had outdone herself yet again (how does she manage every time?).

A live balloon artist stood by just inside the posh lobby, giving the beautiful children an exhilarating choice between the ball pit and the opportunity to stand by, eyes wide in fascination, as the “balloon man” twisted balloon after balloon into stick-figure people and a colorful variety of animals and objects.

Most of the kids, of course, chose both, and multiple times, which was fine, by the way—that’s what those amusements were there for!

After checking in, the Hamaspik

guests made their way to their suites. Each room was equipped with four beds, two for staff members and two for Hamaspik’s precious guests.

After settling in and unpacking, the guests and their counselors made their way back to the Walnut Ballroom, where a “toameha” buffet was set out, giving guests and staff a taste of Shabbos in the hours before candlelighting. Immediately after and along with the pre-Shabbos buffet sampler was a hands-on art project set up on tables.

With that high-energy afternoon introduction behind them, the girls, boys and counselors returned to their rooms to get ready for the serene Shabbos.

Continued on page E10



PACKAGE DEAL A close-up of the goodies awaiting guests as organized by Mrs. Katina

CAMP RUACH HACHAIM

Summer 2016

A Camp for Special Needs Boys From All Over the World



The Camp Where Fun Comes to Life

For more information, please contact Simcha Scharf - Director
 Phone: 718-963-0090
 266 Penn Street - Brooklyn, NY 11211
 cmpruachhachaim@gmail.com - www.campruachhachaim.org

Leading the Way for Accessible Homes for People with Disabilities

With New State Grant, Hamaspik of Orange County Again on Forefront of Serving Community

Hamaspik of Orange County has done it again.

Serving the greater community via broad-based, far-reaching social-services initiatives such as the Access to Home (ATH) program, Hamaspik of Orange County—and Hamaspik in general—continues to exemplify the public-private partnership done right.

While Hamaspik was founded in 1986 with one group home for children with severe intellectual disabilities, it has long since branched out to numerous areas of social and human services.

Among these is Access to Home, a long-running and vital program provided under the auspices of the New York State Homes and Community Renewal (HCR), a state umbrella agency comprising all of New York's major housing and community renewal agencies.

Hamaspik has served as one of the state's numerous non-profits pro-

viding ATH to the community for a number of years now, renovating and upgrading residences in Kings, Orange and Rockland County and making homes independently livable.

Among the awardees in the state's newest round of ATH funding, Hamaspik of Orange County figures high on the list. With the release of HCR's 2015 fiscal-year grant awardees, the agency is now the sole non-profit tapped to provide Access to Home to the entire Orange County region.

What that means is that if you or a loved one lives in Orange County and needs home improvement to make living with a disability more livable, Hamaspik of Orange County can now once again help.

Under Access to Home, people with physical disabilities, and/or seniors with substantial difficulty with daily living activity because of aging, may obtain adaptations and

alterations to their primary residences, allowing them to remain in their own homes instead of moving to most costly and restrictive institutional settings.

In plain English, that means wheelchair ramps, restroom grab bars, roll-in showers, widened bathtubs, wheelchair-accessible sinks and cabinets, and the like.

Other home renovations covered by ATH include wheelchair lifts, widened doors, safety handrails, staircase chair lifts, non-skid flooring, or even low-cost measures like extra outdoor lighting.

To qualify for Access to Home assistance, one merely need prove a medically documented, permanent physical disability or activity of daily living (ADL) difficulty, and not earn more than 80 percent of the area median income (AMI).

With Hamaspik at the helm, hundreds of New York seniors and others in three counties have benefit-

ed over the years.

Provided as it is by Hamaspik, the ATH program has been revamping, overhauling, remodeling or otherwise improving homes and even apartments for people with special needs for years now.

Thanks to the ATH program, venerable seniors, beloved grandparents and even, tragically, accident victims can continue to care for themselves right at home, retaining their dignity and helping them remain connected to community and family.

Applying for the program is a rather simple process.

A phone call to Hamaspik, regardless of which county branch, will connect the inquirer to each agency's dedicated Access to Home coordinator.

The coordinator will note down all pertinent information and, with a few friendly key questions, will walk the caller through the qualifica-

tion process.

A personal visit to the site in question follows, in turn followed by a detailed written assessment of the renovations or home improvements required. That assessment is then put out for bids with partner contractors—quality home-improvement professionals who have a solid track record of delivering results.

Bids (often based on site visits by bidding contractors) shortly come in, and with paperwork signed, work commences.

Depending on the work demanded, it could be days or months until completion—but when it's done, you can be sure it's a job well done, with life never to be the same, and in the best of ways. ■

For more information on Hamaspik of Orange County's Access to Home program, please call 845-774-8400, extension 354.

Hamaspik on Long Island

Development Centers (RRDCs).

In 2009, the Ronkonkoma-based non-profit Self Initiated Living Options (SILO), the designated RRDC serving Long Island, needed e-mods for one NHTD client on the island—and turned to Hamaspik to comprehensively help it meet that individual client's needs.

Opening a new front

A relatively short time later, having secured a toehold on Long Island through the Dept. of Health's NHTD

program, Hamaspik of Kings County further secured its beachhead by establishing a relationship with the Long Island regional office of the OPWDD.

The Office for People With Developmental Disabilities is the state agency that serves as Hamaspik's original public-sector partner. Having worked with the OPWDD in the Hudson Valley from its 1986 founding and having since expanded to New York City, Hamaspik now broadened its hor-

izons to a new frontier in which to bring its five-star caring and service.

Much of that groundwork was put in by Hamaspik of Kings County's Julie Bergmann.

By the fall of 2010, after months of effort by Mrs. Bergmann, Hamaspik of Kings County was an officially recognized provider of OPWDD services under its Long Island regional office.

Specific impetus to branch out onto Long Island was the simple fact that an existing Hamaspik of Kings County beneficiary from Brooklyn had moved out there—and had asked Hamaspik to come along.

A family affected by disability had greatly benefited from Hamaspik and its ability to get the job done right, and had accordingly sought MSC services from the agency on Long Island.

Hamaspik, in the form of Julie Bergmann, MSC Supervisor Shalva Sashitzky and Executive Director Joel Freund, was only too happy to oblige.

Dream team

Among Hamaspik's numerous services and supports for people with developmental disabilities (and their loving families) is the vital Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC) program. With a dedicated Hamaspik MSC, the individual receiving any number of beneficial spe-

cialty Medicaid programs has an advocate and defender at his or her side.

In years past, the *Gazette* has extensively documented the rather heroic distances MSCs have gone for their clients—efforts not demanded by their job descriptions but driven by the very real love they harbor for their caseloads.

Mrs. Bergmann of Hamaspik of Kings County is one such elite MSC.

Mrs. Bergmann regularly goes all out for her clients, along with fellow Hamaspik of Kings MSCs Mrs. Zelma Feldman, Mrs. Chedva Freund, Mrs. Chava Goldstein, Mrs. Sarah Mindy Leitner and Mrs. Frumit Strulovic. Mr. Moshe Goldberger and Mr. Naftali Weiser round out the Hamaspik of Kings County MSC team.

Branching out, moving up

Fast-forward several years, and Hamaspik's MSC caseload on the island steadily grew, thanks primarily to Mrs. Bergmann's driven and focused long-term efforts.

With Mrs. Bergmann at first tending to one MSC beneficiary, then a handful, the logistics grew increasingly illogical: Why should MSC beneficiaries have to drive in to Brooklyn, or an MSC drive out from Brooklyn, for face-to-face meetings when you could have a local office?

At the same time, about one year ago, Mrs. Bergmann began actively pushing Hamaspik services and supports on Long Island, becoming the increasingly visible face of the agency by appearing at regional symposia, health fairs and other events pertaining to special needs.

The result was a significant spike in MSC clients from Queens and Long Island being serviced by Mrs. Bergmann out of Brooklyn.

Thus, several months ago, Hamaspik of Kings County Director of Development Naftali "Tully" Tessler got a call from Executive Director Freund. "Let's take one of our employees and put them out there," Freund said, as Tessler recalls. (You can surely guess who was tapped.)

An existing real-estate location was found in mid-November in centrally-located Far Rockaway, a suburb at the gateway to Long Island's Five Towns area.

With a lease shortly signed, Mr. Tessler found himself purchasing office furniture for the new office.

And this December, Mrs. Bergmann marked her official first day in a new Hamaspik field office she veritably built and earned herself. A second staffer will be hired to join her in coming weeks.

"I have a friendly relationship with the Long Island DDRO," or Developmental Disabilities Regional Office, Mrs. Bergmann humbly states. "I think it should be emphasized that services and the process to get those services in Long Island are different than in New York City. That's why it makes sense to have a specific MSC to handle the area so we can keep up on the changes and related training for this area."

She would know. But in knowing precisely what is needed for what area, and then going out and getting it done, the MSC symbolizes Hamaspik's ethos of not just doing the job, but of doing it right. ■

Picture of the Month



GIFTS OF FRIENDSHIP Hamaspik of Rockland County Day Hab beneficiary Shimon is all Chanukah smiles after getting a holiday present from Monsey pillar and regular Hamaspik visitor Dr. Baruch (Bert) Cunin, Ph.D.—who clearly feels the same

The Senior Care Gazette

News from the World of HamaspiKare, HamaspiK Choice and Senior Health

BROOKLYN ENERGY EXECUTIVE SEES THE LIGHT WITH HAMASPIKCARE FOR BELOVED GRANDFATHER

Entrepreneur Scores a Different Kind of Maximum Efficiency with Home Care

The longtime Brooklyn entrepreneur, who requested anonymity from the *Gazette*, knows a thing or two about finding a good deal.

His energy efficiency consultancy, a sizable state player in his market of choice, helps small private business and huge public entities alike cut to the bottom dollar on power costs across New York.

The gentleman typifies the challenges of the “Sandwich Generation” with an Orthodox Jewish twist. Where conventional middle-agers find themselves simultaneously caring for aging parents and growing children, he does all that—plus assist his venerated 87-year-old grandfather.

So when it came time to find the right plan of care for the family patriarch, the man knew that the bottom line was the bottom line. In a word? Results.

Some two years ago, the man’s grandfather, who’s had Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and dementia for the past decade, was not getting satisfactory regular care.

But his grandson the businessman is also a close friend of one Mordechai Wolhendler, who’s also the capable and energetic

Downstate Regional Director for HamaspiKare—HamaspiK’s five-star, Joint Commission-certified home-care agency now in its fifth year.

Needless to say, both grandfather and grandson are happy campers now.

With HamaspiKare’s superlative industry expertise, the senior family member was shortly signed up for 24/7 live-in care—a critical component of care that had been painfully absent earlier. The junior member had found himself one time too many making bleary-eyed dashes to his grandfather’s home at 3:00 a.m. after his frantic grandmother called to report yet another fall.

Working extensively with HamaspiKare’s top-notch staff, including Field Nurse Ahuva Chemtob, RN (“She’s a tzaddeikis,” he says, using a phrase denoting spiritual and moral excellence), the executive found the perfect team of home health aides (HHAs) and personal care aides (PCAs). They not only care for his beloved progenitor, but their personalities click well with their patient, too.

It’s been some three months since he began his frail and involved grandfather on

HamaspiKare, and the improvements have been remarkable.

The aides provide every level of immediate care ‘round the clock, from bathing and hygiene to monitoring and medication observation. Gone are the uncertainty and insecurity. In their place is an honored family patriarch whose wife, the honored family matriarch, can sleep through the night knowing that her spouse is safe—and a grandfather who’s much more relaxed and less agitated.

“The family can go back to normal life,”

he says with a sigh of relief. “They’re taking good care of him, and he likes his aides. He’s happy with them.”

What’s more, should issues and questions arise (and with such an involved patient, they do), HamaspiKare’s staff regularly communicates with the devoted grandchild, he reports. “There’s who to talk to,” he says. “I have no complaints.”

With their grandfather now being proactively and professionally cared for by HamaspiKare, the entrepreneurial grandson and his entire family have scored a different kind of maximum efficiency.

Asked about that, Wolhendler responds, “It was nothing. I’d do it for anyone!” ■

Not yet a close friend of Mordechai Wolhendler? Not a problem! For anything related to caring for loved ones at home, or just to shmooze, Mordechai will gladly talk to you at 718-408-6706.



LINE OF SUPPORT In the thick of a typical workday scene, Wolhendler works the phones

“Doing chessed for others as long as there is chessed to be done”: The Director of Patient Services Writes

In response to a recent request by Gazette Editor Mendy Hecht for the latest goings-on at HamaspiKare, tireless HamaspiKare Director of Patient Services Rena Milgraum, RN penned the following informal report from home despite a very late hour. Minus minimal cosmetic touch-ups and editor’s comments, we give you the unvarnished original. It speaks for itself.

Hello Mr. Hecht,

Apologies for being so busy, too busy to talk, but it’s been for good things baruch Hashem [thank God—ed.].

I’m not sure if you heard but we have doubled in size in the past two years and are constantly providing chessed [lit. kindness; i.e. social justice—ed.]!

Of course, such beautiful growth like this only happens with such a committed and devoted team, which we most definitely have at HamaspiKare.

Our intake department constantly works with such enthusiasm with each and every thing they do, finding out exactly what service they need, or getting them services from HamaspiKare ASAP, if need be.

The marketing success speaks for itself by the numerous clients approaching us daily that come to HamaspiKare choosing us to be their Agency of choice and to serve them.

The recruitment team has done an absolutely fabulous job at increasing our staff in Orange County and Brooklyn, so that we can accommodate our increasing client numbers.

You would not believe how talented our HR department is. They make the aides that come to us feel so comfortable and happy to be signing up with us! As one of our PCAs [Personal Care Aides—ed.] recently told one of our HR members, “I talk on the radio sometimes and I tell all the aides out there to go and work for HamaspiKare because they’re going to treat you right.” Once they start the process of signing up aides, they do it as quickly as possible, and make sure everything is in compliance such as that the aides are healthy to work! They have HamaspiKare’s best interests in mind because their Number One goal is to prepare the aides to deliver top-quality service as fast as possible.

Compliance itself is not an easy task because it relates to all aspects of the company: Employees, employers, contracts, etc. but it’s no issue for us because we have an extremely knowledgeable and bright corporate compliance officer on our side coming in with many years of experience working in HamaspiKare.

Our wonderful team of nurses is doing an unbelievable job at orienting and supervising the aides to make sure our clients are not only taken care of, but feel safe in our hands as well. The number of times that the nurses have worked passed their “working hours” putting their personal lives on hold for the safety or comfort of their patients is immeasurable.

The schedulers are working hard every minute of every day so that the patients’ shifts are covered. This can be quite challenging at times because we at HamaspiKare try to find not just any aide, but the **right** aide for our clients. The schedulers’ job in finding and maintaining adequate coverage can sometimes seem near impossible, but their daily extensive efforts shine through consistently.

The scheduling supervisors work around the clock, and when I say, “around the clock,” I mean AROUND THE CLOCK, to make sure all scheduling is running smoothly and that no client is left without service. They also ensure that our aide documentation is up to par. They truly try to serve our beloved clients to their maximum ability.

Our Billing/Finance department is really one of a kind. They are not only extremely pleasant to be around but also get the job done exceptionally well. No job is too big for them; everything will be taken care of whether it’s a payroll run or a contract question. Their meticulous work ethic makes the entire HamaspiKare team feel as though everything is under control whether it is for their own personal welfare or the welfare of HamaspiKare.

The devotion and commitment of the Administrator [Mr. Asher Katz—ed.] himself can never be underestimated because everyone knows he has not only his mind in the job, but his heart in it too. He’s a leader who looks out for the well-being of every client and staff member, both in and out of the office.

The dedication and passion to help our clients is mamish [Yiddish for literally—ed.] seen on a daily basis here at HamaspiKare, by each and every team member, to serve every client with the utmost quality care which is validated by the tremendous success we have had over the past two years. One of my dearest clients once told me when I was a [HamaspiKare] Field Nurse, “You should not think that just because you get paid for it that it isn’t chessed, because it still is.” I believe that this is the truth 100%.

May we all be zoche [deserving of merit—ed.] to continue to be matzliach [successful—ed.] in doing chessed for others as long as there is chessed to be done. ■

The Senior Care Gazette



ON THE FRONT LINES Downstate Director Wolhendler looks on as HamaspiKCare Administrator Asher Katz shows HamaspiKChoice Executive Director Yoel Bernath around

Continued from cover

Headquartered at 295 Division Ave. in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, which remains its central regional address, HamaspiKCare of Downstate also maintains a small satellite office on the premises of HamaspiK's Borough Park complex.

That small satellite office has now grown and relocated within Borough Park.

Instead of serving the local community from on-site desks and areas on the premises of HamaspiK of Kings County's Borough Park offices on 14th Avenue, HamaspiKCare's Borough Park station will now serve the public out of its own standalone offices.

From concept to completion, the transition from on-site to independent office took an impressive and rapidly-moving seven weeks, and the new satellite facility now serves as yet another milestone marking HamaspiK's 13th year of providing home care services to the community.

But considering the ethos of hard work and "getting it done" that drives HamaspiKCare—and, indeed, the entire HamaspiK—it was almost expected.

Grounds to grow

If there's one thing about all services, supports and divisions of HamaspiK that stays the same, it's that nothing ever stays the same—and in the best of ways.

Work at HamaspiK long enough, as this writer has, and you'll notice that HamaspiK is always building, hiring, and growing.

That mechanism was very much in evidence in the months running up to the decision by HamaspiKCare Downstate Director Mordechai Wolhendler to ask for an independent office.

A growing list of satisfied community members were being served with their every home care need. Personal care aides (PCAs),

home health aides (HHAs), registered nurses (RNs) and every stripe of therapist were going out to visit seniors and others in their homes to provide superlative care. As word kept getting out on the street and more people called in for services for loved ones (or themselves), HamaspiKCare downstate had to take on more staff—scheduling coordinators and other office staff and, of course, care professionals like PCAs, HHAs, RNs and so on.

And HamaspiKCare's office areas at 4102 14th Ave. in Borough Park found themselves increasingly running out of room.

From basement to beehive

Sometime in October, HamaspiKCare Downstate, under Mr. Wolhendler's capable leadership, took the first steps to expand.

Feelers were put out. Calls to real-estate professionals were made. Prospective sites were located and visited. And a final location, on Borough Park's central 15th Avenue commercial/residential strip, was ultimately selected.

A contractor was brought in to renovate and overhaul an ordinary space, transforming a drab Brooklyn basement into a surprisingly contemporary workplace that struck this editor as looking more like an upscale art gallery or restaurant than an office.

Furniture including desks, computers and phone systems (all professionally installed and tweaked by HamaspiK techie extraordinaire Aaron Rubinstein), file cabinets and cafeteria equipment (no office is complete without that coffee machine!) were put in place.

By early December 2015, HamaspiKCare Administrator Asher Katz was already talking about a Kevias Mezuzah, a mezuzah-mounting ceremony in which the traditional sacred scrolls would be placed per Jewish law on the new center's doorways—thus formally and symbolically establishing the official opening of the

new offices for business.

In early January, that dream became a reality.

Facts on the grounds

HamaspiKCare's dozen or so office-based employees, from Mr. Wolhendler on down, had already been informally working out of the new center for about two weeks when the agency finally celebrated the formal inauguration of its new independent Borough Park office.

Instead of being crammed into an existing location, where they were the welcome long-term guests of HamaspiK of Kings County, HamaspiKCare's Borough Park staff now had a brand-new place of their own.

Around the 1:00 p.m. official starting time on Wednesday, Jan. 6, HamaspiKCare and HamaspiK staff from Brooklyn, upstate Rockland County and as far north as Orange County's Kiryas Joel descended upon the new location for an afternoon of celebration, inspiration and reinvention.

A catered buffet lunch on well-set round tables filled the center's spacious conference room. Groups of employees from HamaspiK of Kings, Orange and Rockland Counties, including respective Executive Directors Joel Freund, Moses Wertheimer and Meyer Wertheimer (who is also the energetic founder of HamaspiK), were seen chatting and catching up with other members of the family that is the greater HamaspiK staff body.

Also present was Mr. Katz, as well as Yoel Bernath, a HamaspiK stalwart and HamaspiKCare's first administrator who now heads up the agency's HamaspiK Choice managed long-term care (MLTC) plan.

Mr. Wolhendler gave the *HamaspiK Gazette* a quick tour of the center.

Newly-laid shallow front steps lead gently down to the basement entrance, where a stylish white brick façade marks a contemporary reception area fitted out with comfortable chairs, relaxing lighting and a potted plant.

To the right is a receptionist's elongated window and service counter, beyond which several workstations line the wall of a spacious open work area. These are HamaspiKCare's local coordinators, who work their phones and computers each day (and often, evening) ensuring that the agency's hundreds of beneficiaries are getting the care at home they need, when they need it.

Further down the floor past those desks is Mr. Wolhendler's new office, where the *Gazette* later snaps a few photos of the man in action, at least on the phone.

Back in the front lobby, where

Meyer Wertheimer was seen chatting with Mr. Wolhendler's proud father, himself a noted community activist, the *Gazette* was shown the office's left flank by Mr. Wolhendler.

The aforementioned conference room lies to the direct left of the lobby; it is furnished with a giant and technology-ready monitor for live teleconferences and the not-infrequent staff trainings and recertifications that HamaspiKCare regularly gives its staff. There's also, as mentioned, a fully-appointed cafeteria counter in the rear of the room.

Beyond that, occupying the rear left of the floor plan, are cubicles for additional coordinators and other HamaspiKCare service staff. Affordable HamaspiKCare bookkeeper Yossi Podrigal, who's rarely if ever seen without a smile, also keeps a desk here; the new center allows him to commute his formerly daily commute to Rockland County, as he lives in Borough Park.

What's more, an elegant permanent outdoor entrance shelter will soon be covering the outdoor entrance staircase leading down to the front door, giving visitors a sense of the office's prominence and presence.

Putting up (with) growth

The ceremony began with Mr. Wolhendler honoring agency founder Wertheimer with the installation of the first mezuzah, marking Mr. Wertheimer's opening doors of services for thousands over the decades (not to mention doors of employment for thousands more) by bestowing on him the honor of symbolically establishing HamaspiKCare's newest front door.

With a modern electric screwdriver in one hand and the ancient mezuzah in its weatherproof plastic case in the other, Mr. Wertheimer brought together the old and the new, a community's age-old values of genuine caring furthered by the latest tools of technology.

Staff gathered around to

observe the mezuzah being affixed to the door, then reciprocated Mr. Wertheimer's "mazel tov!" wishes to staff for crossing a blessed new threshold.

Mr. Wolhendler, hands filled with mezuzos and accompanied by Administrator Katz and Director of Business Development Mordechai ("Marty") Follman, next made his rounds of the office's doorways, honoring various agency leaders and staff members with ceremonial mezuzah mountings.

These included HamaspiK Choice leader Bernath, Executives Moses Wertheimer and Joel Freund, HamaspiKCare's Downstate outreach director Ben Kolman, Orange County Outreach Specialist Joel Nojovitz and bookkeeper Yossi Podrigal.

HamaspiK of Kings County Director of Development Naftali Tessler was also recognized by being honored with the putting up of a mezuzah. (Most doorways get one.) Naturally, Messrs. Katz and Wolhendler were also honored with mezuzah installations of their own.

A will and a way

With mezuzos securely in place throughout the facility, celebrants sat down to do lunch.

Some 20 minutes later, HamaspiK founder and HamaspiK of Rockland County Executive Director Meyer Wertheimer rose to share a few heartfelt remarks.

Mr. Wertheimer first thanked all the guests from coming from near and far to celebrate yet another new chapter in HamaspiK history—a history marked by the agency's parlaying of its deep community grassroots and unparalleled cultural familiarity into a comprehensive and ever-expanding non-profit agency that speaks the community's language.

"When there's a will, there's a way," Mr. Wertheimer declared, proudly praising the hardworking

Continued on next page



WORK HIGHLIGHTS With a flashlight drill, HamaspiKCare's Ben Kolman affixes a mezuzah to a new office door

The Senior Care Gazette

Continued from previous page

downstate staff for their relentless push to make the new office a reality.

HamaspiKare Administrator Katz next spoke, dwelling briefly on the now-completed project's history from initial germ to final product. After acknowledging several staff members and their devotion, Mr. Katz singled out Wolhendler for a special thank-you, highlighting his "one hundred percent involvement" in the entire effort from start to finish.

Mr. Wolhendler was then surprised with a gift—a sizable decorative vase for his own home, a gesture not just to himself but to his own family, too, in appreciation for the endless late nights and early mornings hard at work away from home.

Wolhendler was then asked to share a few words.

The Downstate Director first personally thanked several key employees for their vital contributions. He mentioned Mr. Tessler for his overall involvement, recent-

ly-hired Office/Maintenance Manager Yehoshua Waldman for hitting the ground running (and then taking off in a blur!), Family Care Liaison/IT Manager Moses Maleh for his assistance, and computer whiz Rubinstein for being "on the job all the time."

Drawing inspiration from his own past experiences explaining what a mezuzah is to someone unfamiliar with Jewish laws and customs, Mr. Wolhendler touched upon the spiritual message of the mezuzah, and expanded that to HamaspiKare's greater mission and the work that it does.

Mr. Wolhendler also quickly reviewed HamaspiKare's downstate history, recalling how the licensed home-care services agency (LHCSA)—which opened over five years ago in upstate Rockland County—had initially put a desk in a corner of the NYSHA Clinic to serve as its new satellite base from which to reach out to the entire Big Apple.

Just a few short years later, HamaspiKare of the downstate region is a force to be reckoned with, both throughout Brooklyn

and beyond.

The Downstate Director also thanked HR Director Kolman for his constant assistance to HamaspiKare patients, and likewise acknowledged Mr. Podrigal for keeping the inner gears and pulleys turning.

Groundwork for the next stage

With remarks concluded and most guests out the door and back to the remainder of their workdays, the HamaspiKare staff of the new office, which had enjoyed an hours-long break during the inaugural luncheon, marched back in and took up positions at their desks as if nothing had happened.

Even Mr. Rubinstein, HamaspiKare's upstate computer technician and a guest at the proceedings, was seen at the front desk's computer, intently ironing out some last-minute glitch.

In the work area just outside Mr. Wolhendler's office, as well as in the open space on the floor's other side, are several empty desks.

Room for expansion, the Downstate Director explains. ■

SERVING BROOKLYN'S DIVERSE COMMUNITIES

Brooklyn's a pretty diverse place, to say the least.

So it perhaps should be no surprise that HamaspiKare's Downstate division, with offices servicing the many tribes of Brooklyn, has of late been seeing an influx of Hindu immigrants.

These New Americans of Indian heritage are increasingly approaching HamaspiKare with an eye towards securing CDPAS for their honored parents, reports HamaspiKare Downstate Director of Outreach Ben Kolman.

That program, an acronym for Consumer Directed Personal Aide Service, allows seniors and qualifying others (such as accident/injury victims, or the chronically ill) in need of a hand at home or about town to get personal aides in the form of their own family members, including their own adult children.

(A new law spearheaded by New York State Sen. Simcha Felder, going into effect in April

of 2016, will actually allow parents of adult children with disabilities to serve their own grown kids as CDPAS aides.)

Thanks to a recent chance encounter between Mr. Kolman and several members of Brooklyn's Hindu community, whom the HamaspiKare leader met at a local home health aide (HHA) training program, HamaspiKare has become an agency of choice to that niche demographic.

For Kolman, informing the *Gazette* of the development by phone, it's all part of serving as broad a community base as possible. Scanning his e-mail while still speaking to this editor, more of that service unfolds. "I just got another referral," he says. ■

For more information about HamaspiKare home-care services in Brooklyn or to inquire about employment, please call 1-855-HAMASPIK (426-2774).

Hillary Clinton proposes Alzheimer's plan

Leading Democratic presidential candidate and former New York U.S. Senator Hillary Clinton announced a wide-ranging plan on December 22 to combat Alzheimer's disease and find a cure by 2025. Mrs. Clinton's proposal includes a boost in research funding.

Under the new proposal, the federal government under a Clinton presidency will spend \$2 billion per year on Alzheimer's research.

"We owe it to the millions of families who stay up at night worrying about their loved ones afflicted by this terrible disease and facing the hard reality of the long goodbye to make research investments that will prevent, effectively treat and make a cure possible by 2025," Clinton said in a statement.

Alzheimer's is the 6th leading cause of death in the U.S. and its annual cost, combined with related dementias, exceeds \$200 billion.

New York Times takes informative look at age-85-plus city residents

A six-part, yearlong series in *The New York Times* on New York City residents age 85 and up concluded with the close of 2015.

The lengthy series concluded, among other things, that "older people have a greater sense of well-being than younger ones—not because they're unreservedly blissful, but because they accept a mixture of happiness and sadness in their lives, and leverage this mixture when events come their way. They waste less time on anger, stress and worry."

Most also make gratitude for life's blessings, from large families to simply waking up in the morning, a key part of their daily outlook. Some also expressed a clear-minded and childlike wonder at their having arrived at such old age, and in relatively good health.

The article cites aging experts like Monika Ardel, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Florida, who say that older really is wiser. According to Dr. Ardel, the *Times* reported, even as the brain slows down or memory deteriorates, older people are often better decision-makers, recognizing patterns or being more attuned to the effects of their decisions.

"In surveys of people in nursing homes and hospices, Dr. Ardel found that wisdom was positively related to their sense of well-being, even after the researchers controlled for factors like physical health, financial status and social engagement," the *Times* reported. "The frailer or closer to death people became, the greater the role wisdom played in

their feelings of well-being."

"We have this idea of 'successful aging,' that it should be a prolongation of middle age: Don't get sick, stay active, keep in touch with your friends," Dr. Ardel told the *Times*. "But eventually that's not always possible. For many people, the argument is that if I cannot be like I was in middle age, I don't want to enter old age. But you take something away from the last stage of life."

Levels of gratitude, forgiveness, calm and appreciation all rise through midlife to a peak around age 70, and remain relatively high through later years, another expert told the *Times*. Anger and stress, on the other hand, recede.

Conversely, the older people get, the more positive they are about aging and the more adaptive they are to their limitations, another expert said—and that while social science tends to define old people by their disabilities, people do not.

Indeed, recent research suggests that people's attitude toward aging, even in their younger years, may affect their bodies as well. The *Times* cited 2002 research by Harvard and Yale Universities, which found that people 50 and older who had positive images of old age lived an average of 7.5 years longer.

What's more, another study cited by the *Times* found that "people who felt their life had a goal or purpose showed lower

rates of memory loss and other diseases associated with old age." That study also found that people who had expressed more purpose in life had better-functioning brains that were less damaged by Alzheimer's.

"Maybe this is a gift of old age," offers *Times* reporter John Leland, "that in its assault on the present moment, it also elevates it as the thing worthy of our concentration."

"Whatever I do this second affects what the next second will be. So I try not to do anything negative, which is my best insurance that the world will be better next second, or at least not worse," Jonas Mekas, an artsy, Ukrainian-born New York filmmaker still active and healthy at 93, told the *Times*. "But of course, my positive action may be undermined by 100 negative actions of others and so it may mean nothing. But I still have to follow that dictum. You can call it optimism."

According to research commissioned for the *Times* series, 58 percent of New York City residents age 85 and older report problems with walking. Some 31 percent report cognitive difficulty while one in five report hearing problems. Significantly, that research also indicates that 19 percent of these seniors live in poverty, with half saying they have trouble living independently.

The *Times* reports that there are about 150,000 New York City

residents aged 85 and over, less than two percent of the population. The majority of them are widowed white women, and their numbers have grown five times as fast as the general population, rising nearly 30 percent since 2000.

Psoriasis drug shows promise for spine arthritis

People with a debilitating form of arthritis in the spine seem to do better with psoriasis drug Cosentyx, according to a new study.

A form of arthritis called *ankylosing spondylitis* causes inflammation around the vertebrae, which can lead to chronic pain and stiffness in the back and neck and, in some people, eventually cause some vertebrae to fuse into an immobile position. The condition commonly strikes the lower back, and most commonly young people before age 40.

In the study of close to 600 people with ankylosing spondylitis worldwide, some patients were given regularly weekly and then monthly shots of Cosentyx, a relatively new drug for the skin disorder psoriasis. Others were given a placebo. After four months, 61 percent of those on Cosentyx reported at least a 20-percent improvement.

The study was published Dec. 24 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. ■

IN THE KNOW

All about... ulcerative colitis

Colitis and Crohn's... two opposite ends of the same spectrum. Same disease. Different forms.

Colitis, also known as ulcerative colitis (UL-sur-uh-tiv koe-LIE-tis), is inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) that affects just the colon—specifically, the lining of the colon. Crohn's disease is IBD that affects the entire digestive system.

Inflammatory bowel disease, for its part, is when the immune system attacks the digestive system.

Fortunately, for people with colitis, there is effective long-term treatment for the uncomfortable long-term condition—with the right diagnosis.

Definition

Ulcerative colitis is a chronic disease of the large intestine, also known as the colon. In colitis, the lining of the colon becomes inflamed and develops ulcers, or tiny open sores. The ulcers then produce pus and mucus. The combination of inflammation and ulceration can cause abdominal discomfort and frequent emptying of the colon.

Ulcerative colitis may affect as many as 700,000 Americans. Men and women are equally likely to be affected, and most people with it usually develop it before age 30, and are diagnosed in their mid-30s. The disease can occur at any age, though (some don't develop it until after age 60), and older men are more likely to be diagnosed than older women.

Heredity also seems to play a role in that ulcerative colitis is more common in people who have family members with the disease. However, most people with ulcerative colitis don't have this family history. While ulcerative colitis tends to run in families, researchers have been unable to establish a clear pattern of inheritance. Studies show that up to 20 percent of people with ulcerative colitis will also have a close relative with the disease. The disease is more common among

white people of European origin and among people of Jewish heritage.

Symptoms

Unlike many other conditions, symptoms of colitis usually develop over time rather than suddenly. (Conversely, some people with colitis have long periods of remission.) These can also vary, depending on the severity of inflammation and precisely where it occurs.

Most patients with ulcerative colitis experience mild to moderate symptoms, including any of the following:

- Looser/more urgent bowel
- Persistent diarrhea
- Visible loss of blood
- Abdominal/rectal cramping

People suffering from ulcerative colitis often experience loss of appetite and may lose weight as a result. A feeling of low energy and fatigue is also common. Some people develop fevers. Among younger children, ulcerative colitis may delay growth and development.

Possible complications

Colitis patients have also experienced the following symptoms, although most do not get them:

- Severe bleeding
- Perforated colon
- Severe dehydration
- Liver disease (rare)
- Bone loss (osteoporosis)
- Inflammation of the skin, joints and eyes
- Sores in the lining of the mouth
- Increased risk of colon cancer
- Rapid swelling colon (toxic megacolon)
- Increased risk of blood clots in veins and arteries

Cause

The exact cause of ulcerative colitis remains unknown. Previously, diet and stress were suspected, but now doctors know that these factors may aggravate but don't cause ulcerative colitis.

Ulcerative colitis is generally believed today to be the result of an abnormal response by the body's immune system.

Normally, the cells and proteins that make up the immune system protect the body from infection. In people with IBD, however, the immune system mistakes food, bacteria, and other materials in the intestine for foreign substances. When this happens, the immune system sends white blood cells, which attack foreign viruses or bacteria, into the lining of the intestines. Once there, they produce chronic inflammation and ulcerations.

Diagnosis

To diagnose colitis, doctors will likely first rule out other possible causes for the symptoms reported. But to confirm an ulcerative colitis diagnosis, doctors may request one or more of the following tests and procedures:

- Blood tests to check for anemia (low red blood cell count resulting in insufficient oxygen for the body), or signs of infection
- Stool sample to check for the presence of white blood cells, whose presence would indicate ulcerative colitis—as well as help rule out other disorders
- Colonoscopy, which examines the entire colon using a thin, flexible, lighted tube and attached camera. The procedure usually also involves the colonoscopy device collecting a small sample of tissue (biopsy) for laboratory analysis—which can help confirm a colitis diagnosis
- Sigmoidoscopy, which uses the same tube device to examine the sigmoid, the last portion of the colon. If the colon is severely inflamed, the doctor may perform this test instead of a full colonoscopy
- X-ray, used on the abdominal area in the case of severe symptoms to rule out other serious complications like as a perforated colon

• CT and/or MRI scans of the abdomen or pelvis to check for inflammation of the small intestine or other complications, and how much of the colon might be inflamed

• Chromoendoscopy, a spray dye technology that highlights abnormal tissue changes. It is used by some doctors in some colitis cases to screen for colorectal cancer when warranted. Colorectal cancer is the most serious risk associated with ulcerative colitis.

Treatment

Colitis has no known cure. But treatment can greatly reduce signs and symptoms of the disease and even effect long-term remission.

Researchers believe that once the IBD patient's immune system is "turned on," it does not know how to properly "turn off" at the right time. As a result, inflammation damages the organs of the digestive tract like the intestines or colon, causing the symptoms of IBD. For that reason, the main goal of medical therapy is to help patients regulate their immune system better.

Treatment usually involves drug therapy, surgery or both.

Several categories of drugs may be effective in treating ulcerative colitis, including:

- Anti-inflammatory drugs
 - Immunosuppressants
 - Tumor necrosis factor (TNF) alpha inhibitors
 - Entyvio, a drug for people who don't respond to or can't tolerate biologics and other treatments
- Doctors may recommend/prescribe over-the-counter medications to manage specific symptoms of ulcerative colitis, including antibiotics to help prevent or control infection, anti-diarrheal medications for severe cases, iron supplements to counteract any iron deficiency anemia, and pain relievers like acetaminophen for mild pain.
- For some colitis patients, a combination of these drugs works better

than one alone. Corticosteroids also may be used with an immune system suppressor—the corticosteroids can induce remission, while the suppressors can help maintain it.

Surgery

Surgery can often eliminate ulcerative colitis, but usually at the cost of removing the entire colon and rectum (proctocolectomy).

Diet monitoring

Patients may feel helpless when facing ulcerative colitis. But changes to diet and lifestyle may help control symptoms and lengthen the time between flare-ups.

While there is no firm evidence that specific foods can actually cause IBD, certain foods and beverages can aggravate signs and symptoms, especially during a flare-up—so a food diary tracking everything being eaten or drunk, and any resulting feeling, can be helpful.

Items to limit or avoid include dairy products, high-fiber items like fresh fruits and veggies (steamed, baked or stewed may be better), spicy foods, alcohol and caffeine.

Low-fat foods may help avoid indigestion by replacing (and avoiding) butter, margarine, cream sauces and fried foods.

Other dietary measures including eating small meals, drinking plenty of liquids daily, taking multivitamins, and consulting with a registered dietitian.

Prognosis

The symptoms of ulcerative colitis do tend to come and go, with fairly long periods in between flare-ups in which patients may experience no distress at all. These periods of remission can span months or even years, although symptoms do eventually return. The unpredictable course of ulcerative colitis may make it difficult for physicians to evaluate if a particular course of treatment has worked. ■

The AUTISM UPDATE

News and developments from the world of research and advocacy

Disrupted brain signaling linked to symptoms

A small study of 41 people, 21 with autism and 20 without, found a direct link between GABA signaling in the brain and symptoms of autism.

Gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) is a chemical messenger that is widely distributed in the brain. It contributes to motor control, vision and other cortical functions. It also regulates anxiety.

The study is the first to test the idea that GABA signaling is one possible cause of autistic symptoms; previously the connection had been made in animals and genetic studies. The study was published in the December issue of *Current Biology*.

Underlying cause of some autism found?

In independent but related research to the above news, Penn State University scientists found the underlying molecule that controls GABA signaling. Scientists found

that nerve cells of people with a severe form of autism called Rett Syndrome were missing a molecule called KCC2. When KCC2 was added to the cells, GABA signaling returned to normal.

The scientists also found that supplying Rett nerve cells with a molecule called IGF1 produced more KCC2, also returning GABA signaling to normal.

The research, published Jan. 4 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, points to the possibility of restoring KCC2 levels to help treat Rett and other forms of autism.

Mutated autism genes found in untapped part of brain cells

Research has now found that over 100 genes previously linked to autism could be found in the cytoplasm of brain cells. Cytoplasm is the fluid surrounding each cell's nucleus.

The discovery of the genes

whose mutated forms have earlier been linked with autism may help develop targeted new approaches to researching and treating autism.

Group eyeing art's benefits for autism

The American Art Therapy Association is now funding early research into the benefits of art therapy for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), reports the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. Art therapists, caregivers, family members and people with autism themselves have known for years that art significantly helps people with ASD express themselves, the report notes, but little scientific research has been conducted.

Clinton pushes for more autism funding

Continuing a domestic health-policy push that earlier included an Alzheimer's research call, Democratic presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton released a plan on

Jan. 5 that aims to increase screening, improve treatment, bolster research and expand employment and housing opportunities for people with autism.

Over 3.5 million Americans are believed to have an autism spectrum disorder.

The new Clinton plan would encourage states to require that private insurers cover autism services. It also proposes a national outreach campaign to encourage early screening, and an initiative to help students with autism transition out of school and into the workforce.

The plan also embraces general disabilities, calling for continued enforcement of the *Olmstead* ruling that requires independent living in the community.

Study: Autism teens need adult planning

University of Missouri research says that autism care should focus more on planning for adulthood, in contrast (and addition) to today's

emphasis on the earliest possible and most extensive intervention.

According to the study, published in *The Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, caregivers of children with autism should plan for their kids' future as independent adults with autism as early as when their kids are 12.

The researchers found both teens with autism and their caregivers felt fearful and anxious about the teens becoming adults; caregivers also reported lacking social, educational and vocational resources to help their children prepare for their futures.

A number of publicly-funded programs exist nationwide that assist young adults with autism and other disabilities, though; New York State's Supported Employment Program (SEMP), long offered by Hamaspik and others, provides individuals with gainful labor and workplace support. ■

Putting a New Spin on Chanukah with Torah Studies Celebration Hamaspik of Rockland County Men's Program Completes Mishnah

On Monday, December 14, the last of Chanukah's eight days, a group of young men marked the mastery of a section of the Mishnah, the ancient compendium of Jewish law, in the traditional way: With a siyum.

Meaning "ending" or "completion," *siyum* refers specifically to completing the study of any section of Jewish religious texts—a phenomenon common in schools and synagogues alike.

And because of the intellectual and spiritual accomplishment that it represents, a siyum in the Jewish community is cause for not-insignificant celebration.

Feeling like they were part of the community, as they indeed are, were a group of young men who daily attend Hamaspik of Rockland County's exemplary Day Habilitation (Day Hab) program.

Joined by their fellow "Day

Habbers" and staff, and honored by the guest presence of several Hamaspik of Rockland County administrative staffers and leaders, the men took their rightful place of honor at the head table of the Day Hab's dining/multipurpose room.

Kicking off the program were brothers Moshe Fried, Direct Support Professional (DSP) and a longtime and valued Day Hab employee, and the more recently hired Nathan Fried, Hamaspik of Rockland County's Maintenance Manager.

Both are also gifted musicians, hailing from a musical family; Moshe plays the trumpet and Nathan the trombone.

The two of them could be found in one corner of the room, backed by DSP and talented keyboardist and singer Mordechai Dov Neuhauser, churning out merry live music suiting the occasion.

With the guests having arrived, the music stopped and Mr. Neuhauser took to the mike as Master of Ceremonies, introducing the event's opening event, the recitation of the last paragraph of Mishnah in the section that had been studied by the group.

Mr. Shimon

"Shimmy" Goldberger got that honor.

Reciting the last few lines out loud, Shimmy also quickly explained what they meant.

The siyum's guest of honor and featured speaker, career school-teacher and popular community member, emcee Rabbi Yosef Dovid Ungar, took the stand next.

Putting a spiritual spin on the timeless Chanukah game of dreidel, the four-sided spinning top, Rabbi Ungar noted that the entire world turns similarly at the Hand of God. "Nothing happens by itself," he stated, just like no dreidel can stand and spin on its pointed bottom by itself.

Likewise does the Creator, and only the Creator, know where and how the dreidel—or anything, for that matter—will land, rendering the perennially popular Chanukah toy a veritable lesson in spiritual faith.

Rabbi Ungar then turned his attention to Meyer Wertheimer, founder of Hamaspik and Executive Director of Hamaspik of Rockland County. Rabbi Ungar thanked Mr. Wertheimer for making Hamaspik what it is today, and specifically for making possible the community mainstay that is Hamaspik's Day Hab program.

He concluded with motivational comments on being proactive and filled with life, followed by a real-life story of faith in action heard from a friend—in which a man's outlandish and unjustified fine of hundreds of thousands was dismissed when even legal experts said

there was no hope.

The life of the daughter of the official who ultimately dismissed the unwarranted (but otherwise iron-clad) fine had been indirectly saved decades ago by that desperate and despairing man.

Fresh off that inspiration, Mr. Wertheimer took the floor to personally wish "Mazel tov!" congratulations to the group of men completing the tract of Mishnah.

In an ensuing moment of public recollection and reflection, the agency leader divulged that his career-long involvement in community human services began with his teenage volunteering to provide personal care and hygiene assistance to a venerated community elder.

Having had personal first-hand, hands-on experience in the direct-care field, Mr. Wertheimer expressed identification with the vital work performed every day by the Day Hab's DSPs.

He then moved on to hail Day Hab Manager Pinchas Knopfler, whose understated dedication to his job, one that far exceeds his official job description, is known throughout Hamaspik.

The Executive Director likewise singled out Hamaspik of

Rockland County Director of Day Services Shlomo Kornbluh for his off-site work in securing quality mainstream gainful labor for the gentlemen Hamaspik serves. He also praised Director of Development Zalman Stein for his hard-driving quality work.

Framed certificates of achievement were then handed out to the young men, who were only too happy to come to the front of the room, where the elegant documents featuring their names and singing their praises were handed to them with fanfare (and photography).

Beneficiaries of Hamaspik that they are, the young awardees have long felt a part of their surrounding communities. And at Chanukah, of whose several secondary themes is one of education, they went home that afternoon not only feeling embraced, but elevated and celebrated, too.

Which is just about the perfect spin to give the last day of Chanukah. ■



STANDING FOR DISABILITY Director of Day Services Shlomo Kornbluh (l) reacts as Mr. Wertheimer makes a key point



MOMENT OF TRIUMPH Dovid L. looks on as Day Hab staffers (l-r) Chezky Levy, Yitzchok Ciment and Joel Gorelnik present Dovid P. with a well-earned certificate

Hamaspik Tapped by BPJCC to Provide Accessibility Transport Vans to Community

Project Spearheaded by Rep. Jerrold Nadler; Leaders Dedicate Vehicles at Ribbon-cutting Event

The morning of Sunday, January 10, 2016 was marked by another example of Hamaspik's community leadership.

On that day, the Borough Park Jewish Community Council (BPJCC), several prominent elected officials, and various community leaders joined staff of Hamaspik of Kings County at Hamaspik's central Borough Park offices to officially inaugurate new accessible vans for usage by the Borough Park community.

Hamaspik of Kings County, under the leadership of Executive Director Joel Freund, has long enjoyed a mutually beneficial relationship with the BPJCC, under the capable stewardship of executive director Rabbi Yeruchem Silber.

Brightening up the otherwise rainy day were U.S. Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-10th Dist.), New York City Councilmember Brad Lander (D-39th Dist.) and New York State Sen. Simcha Felder (D-17th Dist.), all longtime friends of Hamaspik and the greater Borough Park community.

Also making good on Hamaspik's invitation to attend were community leaders Mr. Berry Spitzer, a member of Borough Park's Community Board 12, Mr. Yehudah Schonfield of New York City Councilmember David Greenfield's office, Shomrim community patrol captain Mr. Simcha Bernath, and community activist Mr. Berish Freilich.

Symbolizing their joining of

forces to collectively help the community, the elected officials and community activists joined together at a bright red line for a ceremonial ribbon cutting.

Together wielding an oversized scissors, Congressman Nadler, BPJCC leader Silber, and Hamaspik's Freund and Tessler snipped the crimson ribbon strung between the vans parked in front of Hamaspik's imposing 14th Ave. location. They then joined the assembled in applause.

Shortly thereafter, the group headed up to the third floor of 4102 14th Ave. for an inaugural breakfast. Congressman Nadler and Councilmember Lander each expressed appreciation to both organizations for their service to their community, and Rabbi Silber and Mr. Freund shortly reciprocated.

The brand-new, state-of-the-art transportation vans are each equipped with a rear-racing wheelchair lift, plenty of interior space for passengers who use wheelchairs, and removable standard seats to allow for quick reconfiguration of seating arrangements as necessary.

Purchase of the vans was made possible by the BPJCC. With critical advocacy by Cong. Nadler, that non-profit had secured a grant from the federal Dept. of Transportation (DOT).

The grant, in turn, was geared to provide communities with increased local transportation for its members



MAKING THE CUT Hamaspik and elected allies mark the moment the new vans are put into public service



INSIDE JOB State Sen. Simcha Felder inspects a van as Hamaspik's Tessler (l) and Day Services Director Yehuda Spangelet (r) look on



THE TIES THAT BIND Rep. Nadler, Director Tessler and Executive Director Silber celebrate a joint achievement

with disabilities. Having secured the grant, and the resulting funding for accessibility vans, the BPJCC then turned to Hamaspik, a community mainstay in services for people with disabilities, to provide said transportation.

The result? Vans adorned with

the DOT, BPJCC and Hamaspik logos are now busy shuttling about the streets of Borough Park providing local transportation for people with disabilities—and symbolizing the best of the public and non-profit sectors coming together to help the community.

Respite Shabbaton

Continued from page E3

Friday-night fun

A simchah-themed activity brought Shabbos in shortly after candle-lighting time, which was at 4:15 p.m., with the children now bathed and dressed in their Shabbos best.

Following that joy-filled and happy group activity, the entire guest body sat down to the Shabbos seudah at 5:45 p.m., with children

enjoying the company of their peers and their caring staff, all while choosing from the wide array of dishes and foods available before them.

Kiddush, challah, salads, fish soup, chicken... you name it, they had it, and all in choice-centered measures judiciously guided by discerning and ever-professional counselors. (The event's one-on-one staff, several dozen in all, had been carefully trained by Mrs. Katina herself in a late-night instructional session at Hamaspik of Rockland County headquarters the week before.)

The highlight of the meal—according to one staff member who reported back to Hamaspik the following week—was a heartfelt talk delivered to the children by Mrs. Katina. Serving as a counselor at the event was worth all the effort and training “just to hear Brenda Katina speak,” the staff member said.

After the meal, another interactive, game-centered

activity themed around colors was led by Mrs. Katina. Needless to say, the kids were excitedly jumping for joy and some quite literally, too!

A new day

Shabbos morning opened relatively bright and early, with the children enjoying another catered buffet spread, this one for breakfast.

After breakfast, an unstructured but supervised morning of Shachris and singing, each at his or her own level, was held, along with a free play period.

The Shabbos lunch was held at 11:30 a.m., with the same level of personal choice and preference in the menu items available right there on the tables.

Throughout it all, a licensed paramedic provided a reassuring presence on the premises throughout the Shabbaton. The medic, for his part, had, thankfully, nothing to do. Hamaspik staff did need to use him once over Shabbos, though—for a child who needed a Band-Aid.

The early afternoon was marked by a special party-themed program led once again by Mrs. Katina.

After a lengthy period of afternoon rest, the boys, girls and their staff gathered in the dining room for

Shalosh Seudos, which segued quickly into Havdalah at Motzoei Shabbos, which was around a quarter to six in the evening.

Shabbos may have been over. But the Shabbaton was only really starting.

Maximum Melava Malka

What to do? Jump up and down on a giant inflatable indoor Moon Bounce? Make a custom and take-home teddy bear with your very own Build a Bear plush cuddly toy? Or both?

Those were the choices Hamaspik's young guests were faced with come the close of Shabbos, both of which kept them busy for a good hour or two.

After that, though, there was plenty more—with a full Melava Malka buffet meal...accompanied by a six-man band and live singer!

The professional musicians and vocalist, reminiscent of Hamaspik's annual family holiday outings, had the beautiful boys taking the stage (and microphone) to give voice to their joy and to share their love of music (and everyone else, for that matter) with the entire program.

That Motzoei Shabbos program left guests and staff on a high note as

they retired to their rooms after a good hour or so of music and dancing.

Not going home the same

Sunday morning was marked by an 8:30 a.m. breakfast.

Once suitably satiated, the guests were diligently packed up by staff, who then led them to the ballroom for the Shabbaton's grand finale: an entertaining live children's show that had everyone laughing and cheering along, especially when audience members were called upon to participate.

The show then may have been over. The suitcases were packed. The rooms were empty. But the hearts were full. Filled and brimming with happiness, love, validation and acceptance—and eagerness to get back home and tell their beloved mothers and fathers what a great time they had with Hamaspik.

And you can be sure that for as wonderful and rejuvenating a time the children had, their noble parents had a weekend that was doubly so—all in keeping with Hamaspik's mission of serving the entire community. That mission marches on to this day, and marches on every day.



SINGING THEIR TUNE At the post-Shabbos bash, two young guests express themselves

Talk therapy overcomes adults' fear of going to dentist

A lot of kids are terrified of dentists. But, it turns out, more than a few adults are, too—so much so that some have full-fledged dentistry phobia.

But a British study of 130 people, average age 40, found that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), commonly known as talk therapy, helped most of them “survive” visits to the dentist’s chair—not without their old fears, but with psychological tools and skills for healthily handling those fears, such as replacing negative thoughts with positive ones.

After the therapy, 79 percent of the patients went on to have dental treatment without the need for sedation.

The findings were published recently in the *British Dental Journal*.

In a previous study in the same journal, the same researchers found that those with dental anxiety were less likely to visit the dentist and more likely to have cavities and other oral health problems.

World’s first smart pill debuts in Cal.

In January, Northern California’s Barton Health system announced that it would be using the Proteus Discover smart pill technology to help treat patients with high blood pressure.

The Proteus Discover smart pill is an ingestible sensor that can be placed inside any pill. It’s linked to a computerized patch that sends information to a Bluetooth-enabled device about when the drug is taken—allowing patients to monitor their drug adherence and transmit that information to their doctors.

For long-term health, social life as important as diet, exercise

A review of four previous studies found a significant correlation between four key health indicators at all stages of life and social ties early in life.

The study found that people who reported higher quality and quantity of social integration and social support at any age in life reported healthier blood pressure, waist circumference, body mass index and systemic inflammation later in life.

“Our analysis makes it clear that doctors, clinicians, and other health workers should redouble their efforts to help the public understand how important strong social bonds are throughout the course of all of our lives,” said researchers at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill, in a university news release. “Based on these findings, it should be as important to encourage adolescents and young adults to build broad social relationships and social skills for interacting with others as it is to eat healthy and be physically active.”

The study ran Jan. 4 in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Kids doc group: Home remedies for coughs/colds

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) now says that parents should use home remedies for common colds and coughs in kids age four and under, not over-the-counter (OTC) medications. Kids between four and six should only take OTCs under the direction

of doctors, they added.

The FDA recommended in 2008 that children under four years old never be treated with OTC cough and cold medicines.

Kids with coughs or colds may not always need treatment, the AAP notes. If they aren’t bothered by symptoms and continue to play and sleep normally, remedies aren’t always necessary.

Here are the AAP’s current suggestions for kids’ colds and coughs:

Runny nose: Runny noses help the body get rid of viruses that make kids sick—so just use tissue and let it run its course.

Stuffy nose: Use homemade saline nose spray—half a teaspoon of salt in eight ounces of warm water—to help loosen mucus.

Coughing: Babies between three months and one year can be given one to three teaspoons of warm, clear fluids, like water or apple juice, four times daily. Kids over 12 months can have up to one teaspoon of honey as needed to thin mucus and loosen coughs.

Coughing spasm: Exposure to warm shower mist can help ease coughing bouts.

The AAP also reminds parents that fevers help the body fight viruses and should only be treated if they reach 102 or higher and the child is uncomfortable.

Gene editing improves muscle in mice with MD

Muscular dystrophy (MD) is a group of over 30 genetic conditions that cause progressive weakness and degeneration of the muscles that control body movement and heart contraction. Currently, no specific treatment can stop or reverse its progression.

But, working with lab mice, scientists have now cut out the “bad” part of the gene that causes Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD), the most common form of MD in kids. The mice showed improved muscle function.

With further development, the approach might be used to correct mutations responsible for MD and other genetic disorders.

In study, dementia drug steadies Parkinson’s patients

A comparison study of 130 Parkinson’s patients who had suffered falls in the last year found that the dementia drug Exelon seems to reduce risk of further falls.

After eight months, the study found that those taking Exelon, which helps maintain concentration and attention, were much steadier when walking and 45 percent less likely to fall than those who took a placebo.

Lung coil implants benefit emphysema patients

Fifty patients with emphysema did better than 50 others after being implanted with coils to prop up their lungs.

The French study of 100 patients measured

their ability to exercise after six months of treatment with or without the implanted coils. The study found over one third of the coil patients showing improved walking, while only nine percent of the control group did.

Emphysema is a type of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) that damages the airways and makes it difficult to breathe.

The study was published Jan. 12 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Scanner, dye “light-en” cancer removal surgery

Wouldn’t it be easier to surgically remove cancerous tissue if you could just make the cancer cells glow?

Using a Lumicell handheld scanner and blue fluorescent dye, Duke University Medical Center researchers were able to do that in a small study.

The dye, injected into areas of cancerous tissue, seeks out protease, an enzyme commonly found in cancer tissue but not healthy

tissue.

The handheld scanner then makes that tissue glow blue—allowing surgeons to see and remove residual cancer tissue not visible to the unaided eye. Most importantly, the technology helps prevent relapses and second surgeries by allowing thorough removals in the first place.

The experimental technology has thus far only been tested on cancerous mice; a human trial is underway. The technique is projected to be available in 2017.

High-tech toys less educational than books, blocks

They may have all the bells, whistles, lights and sounds—but, curiously enough, flashy and expensive electronic “educational” toys, like “baby laptops” and “cell phones,” which supposedly boost language development in infants and toddlers, are less effective than classic toys.

A small study of 26 couples and their children at playtime found that the most verbal exchanges—essentially for tiny developing minds—occurred when reading baby books.

The tiny tots, and their parents, also used more words, but not as many as with the books, when playing with traditional toys like wooden puzzles and rubber blocks with pictures.

Bottom line? The Northern Arizona University (published Dec. 23 in *JAMA Pediatrics*) found that when toys talk and sing, babies don’t. So, stick to the tried and true! ■

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PUBLIC HEALTH and POLICY NEWS

Free 2016 health classes in Rockland County

“Be a healthier you in 2016”—that’s the theme of this year’s series of free health classes for the public being offered by the Rockland County Health Department.

Beginning January, county residents can choose from weekly health workshops on such important health topics as diabetes, weight loss, managing ongoing health conditions, or even preventing falls.

The workshops are being held in Pomona, Nanuet, New City and other convenient area locations. For more information or to register (required), please call 364-2501.

“No Shampoo” good idea?

Supermarkets have endless shelves of them. But now, a growing national movement has simplified the choice of which hair-care products to use—by not using any.

Adherents believe that the chemicals in these shampoos, conditioners, gels, mousses and sprays damage hair’s natural oils, which protect hair from going brittle.

Turns out they’re half-right—the chemicals damage hair only if they’re not regularly washed out.

Also, detergent shampoo is

needed not for the hair but to cleanse the scalp of oil, dried sweat, dirt and dead skin cells.

What comes first—patients or profits?

Under the FDA’s little-known compassionate use program, an unapproved drug for a rare disease called LEMS has been available free of charge for the past 20 years from small privately-owned manufacturer Jacobus Pharmaceutical.

But the same drug, known as 3,4-DAP, is now being manufactured by Catalyst Pharmaceuticals under the brand name Firdapse.

Catalyst has also now applied for FDA approval for Firdapse. If approved, Catalyst would have exclusive 3,4-DAP marketing rights for seven years.

Doctors who treat the estimated 1,500-3000 U.S. LEMS patients now worry that if Catalyst gets approval, the price will skyrocket, making it harder or even impossible for some to get any version.

However, Catalyst says that making the drug available via a regular doctor’s prescription will benefit patients, in contrast to the protracted paperwork process required now to get the drug free from Jacobus.

News with heart

Four heart-related public-health news items grabbed headlines in recent weeks:

- An Oxford University study published Dec. 23 in *The Lancet* says that people at high risk for heart attack or stroke, i.e. those with a history of heart disease, heart failure, kidney disease or diabetes, should take blood-pressure-lowering drugs, regardless of their blood pressure. Such drugs are generally only prescribed for people above certain blood-pressure levels.

- In a Dec. 21 draft recommendation, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force said there’s not enough evidence to recommend screening everyone under 20 for high cholesterol so as to reduce later cardiovascular disease risk—a position now unchanged since 2007. The Task Force did advise that children and teens eat a healthy diet, exercise and maintain a normal weight, though.

- The same draft recommendation also advised that cholesterol-lowering statin drugs be used to prevent a first heart attack or stroke in certain at-risk patients—specifically, people age 40 to 75 with a ten-percent or more risk of heart attack or stroke within ten years.

- A report released Dec. 16 by the American Heart Association (AHA) says that one-third of deaths in the U.S. are caused by heart dis-

ease, stroke and other heart-related disease. According to the report, cardiovascular disease killed 801,000 Americans in 2013.

NIH unveils 2016-2020 Strategic Plan

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) released its 2016-2020 in late December. The plan focuses on four essential, interdependent objectives that will help guide NIH’s priorities over the next five years. These are:

1. Advance opportunities in research, health promotion and disease prevention

2. Foster innovation in agency nimbleness, disease eradication, and rare disease research

3. Developing a top-tier and diverse biomedical research workforce

4. Excelling as a federal science agency by managing for results

Some goals in the Plan are:

- Precision cancer medicine

- A new multi-strain vaccine critical toward a universal flu vaccine

- Effective behavioral and social interventions in populations with health disparities

- Developing a wearable biosensor for monitoring blood-alcohol levels in real time

- Technologies to reverse paralysis and restore some normal functions in spinal-cord patients

who smoked more than a pack a day.

The study was published online Dec. 17 in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

In related news, another Ohio State study found that smokers who saw graphic warning images on cigarette packs had more negative feelings about smoking than those who only saw worded warnings. Federal graphic warning labels were briefly required in 2009, but dropped after a federal court declared the images “unabashed attempts to... browbeat consumers into quitting.”

New vaccine nearly eradicating African meningitis

A vaccine developed in Dec. 2009 to combat Africa’s ongoing meningitis A virus epidemic was first mass-administered in Dec. 2010 to some 20 million young Africans in three countries.

As of the end of 2014, 217 million Africans have been immunized in 15 countries against the virus, rendering it virtually eliminated wherever the vaccine is provided.

The welcome triumph was reported recently in *Clinical Infectious Diseases*.

In other Africa-related health news, survivors of the Ebola virus outbreak that wracked several African countries last year were found in new research to be likely to develop vision and hearing problems, and joint pain, months after treatment.

The new research further underscores the virus’ dangerous ability to hide in patients’ bodies long after recovery. For example, a British nurse working in Africa got Ebola in Dec. 2014 and recovered by Jan. 2015—only to be re-hospitalized ten months later after the dormant virus re-infected her brain. With intensive treatment, she survived.

In Ebola-related news, the Ebola epidemic was officially declared over by the World Health Organization (WHO) in mid-Jan. ■



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Smoking bans, graphics best stop smokers

Here’s some good news for the public’s lungs: An Ohio State University review of national data on 4,300 Americans aged 19 to 31 in 487 cities found that that bans on smoking in public places were most effective at limiting smoking among casual users—those who smoke less than a pack a day.

At the same time, the study’s seven years of annual participant interviews yielded that high cigarette taxes had the most impact on people