

HAMASPIK GAZETTE

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News of Hamaspik Agencies and General Health



OPWDD Commissioner Burke, Ardent Reformer of State Supports, Pays Emotional Visit to Hamaspik

Gray skies and rainy weather may have held sway outside, and a rare East Coast earthquake may have had buildings swaying earlier that week. But at Hamaspik of Orange County's Admin/Day Hab Building in Kiryas Joel, New York, colorful and sunny good cheer was in abundance on Thursday, August 25, 2011, not to mention a veritable tremor on the emotional Richter Scale.

At least that's how OPWDD Commissioner Courtney Burke described it.

The freshman Commissioner, newly tapped by Gov. Andrew Cuomo to head the New York State Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, was visiting Hamaspik for her first time.

Standing in a packed ballroom before a capacity crowd, Burke shared her freshly-made first impression of the voluntary agency thusly: "You shook me to my core."

In a good way, of course.

Having been introduced by emcee Brenda Katina, Hamaspik's seasoned Special Events

Coordinator, Burke expanded on Katina's earlier mention of the earthquake that had struck the Eastern Seaboard, expressing half-joking

gratitude that there were no earthquakes today—but confessing to seismic activity of the spiritual sort upon touring the facility and encour-

tering the earnest satisfaction of individuals being served and the genuine love of those who serve them.

"I will never forget my experiences here today," said Burke.

But the event, which ostensibly introduced OPWDD's newest commissioner to a key constituency, also served a far broader purpose: showcasing a service-delivery model that works.

Tour of duty

The event was called for 10:30 a.m., with the Commissioner's arrival scheduled for that time.

Due to the inclement weather, the groups of individuals and Hamaspik employees who were originally slated to greet Ms. Burke on the impressive flight of outdoor stairs were moved indoors.

The last-minute change hardly put a damper on proceedings, though.

Arriving around 10:15 a.m., the Commissioner was greeted with genuine warmth at the door by Hamaspik Executive Director Meyer

Continued on Page E6



LIFE IS GOOD For Arcadian IRA residents Pinchas P. (c) and Leiby S., an August 24 "merry-time" excursion makes for waves of summer happiness on the Hudson

Hamaspik Remembers

Tenth anniversary of September 11, 2001 evokes horror and hope

Who remembers the weather of Sunday, September 9, 2001? Virtually nobody. Yet even the weather that day was different.

Residents and staff of the Dinev Inzerheim were sitting in their van that morning, awaiting their exciting trip to the city: a ride on the Circle Line around Manhattan, a voyage

across placid waters no one dreamed would be so storm-tossed in a mere two days.

Only right after "the occurrence" did they look back, realizing that the Twin Towers they had marveled at from the Circle Line boat were no longer there and would never be seen again.

Hamaspik then was the proverbial grasshopper at the feet of the giant that is Hamaspik today.

Of the dozen-plus group homes across three counties nowadays, only four were in existence then: the Seven Springs Shvesterheim, the Acres Brierheim and the Forshay Brierheim, all revolving around the Dinev Inzerheim ICF, then the nerve center of Hamaspik activities as the agency's largest facility at the time.

Hamaspik's Monsey offices consisted of a tiny suite, the Kiryas Joel offices weren't much bigger, and the agency's Williamsburg presence existed squarely in the realm of imagination.

As for the agency's PACE program, the *Hamaspik Gazette*, Home Family Care and several more Individualized Residential

Alternatives (IRAs), those likewise were nonexistent at the time.

And total staff, between office workers, administrators and program directors, numbered no more than a few dozen—light-years from the hundreds of current and former employees and several divisions, local offices and centers of today.

A lot of things changed as the years went by, with the best staff members and Direct Support Professionals staying on to this day either in their job positions of yesterday, or moving up—and all growing, as did all of Hamaspik, in expertise, talent and capability.

Today, at the threshold of the tenth anniversary of that terrible day, a day on which anyone older than kindergarten age at the time can

Continued on Page E7

INSIDE

*

Redefining

"Diabetic" — E2

*

Caring for

Aging Parents — E3

*

Day Hab "Weather

Report" — E4

*

Rockland County

EI Grows — E5

*

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Redefining "Diabetic"

For Hamaspik of Kings County MSC staff, teamwork effects transformation

What do Hamaspik MSCs do for the individuals with special needs they serve?

Let's rephrase that: What *don't* they do?

The saga of the individual in question began five years ago, says Hamaspik of Kings County MSC Mrs. Chava Silberman, when she became a Hamaspik beneficiary.

The agency walked her through its perfunctory "extra-curricular services" besides its "nine-to-five" renderings: professional counseling, then marriage, and even an Individual Support Services (ISS) apartment—specialized low-cost housing for qualifying disabled indi-

viduals.

But what makes her story unique (besides her Type 1 diabetes) is that had the young lady merely received simple, no-frills assistance with her duly-qualified entitlements and then proceeded into married life, the rest of the story would have been less than "happily ever after."

Coming as she was from a family with a deceased mother, unavailable father and siblings and thus no guidance and support, hers was a case ripe for falling between the cracks.

But not if Mrs. Silberman could help it.

Virtually becoming the tragic

young woman's mother, Mrs. Silberman used what others would have considered an ending point—"good enough"—as a starting point. All through the individual's engagement, Mrs. Silberman was there for her, giving her endless guidance and preparation for her big day when no one else was.

Today, thanks to an MSC's interventions, the young lady's marriage to a fine young man with special needs of his own is strong—and in a place far healthier than expected.

With her life's functional essentials squared away, the individual's Hamaspik team then got to work on second-tier issues—primarily, her diabetes; the young woman's insulin levels had hovered at too-high levels for far too long, and it was time to finally get them under control.

Mrs. Silberman first used community medical referral resources to find, and then switch her client to, better doctors and diabetes specialists. The Hamaspik MSC also arranged for her to change insurance plans, the better to secure better medical coverage.

Again not leaving good enough alone, Mrs. Silberman saw to it that the individual was accompanied innumerable times to a diabetes specialist in Manhattan, as well as securing near-daily intervention that allowed her to attain stable insulin levels.

Finally, working with community organization Friends With Diabetes (FWD) led by self-taught

diabetes and health expert Rabbi Hirsch Meisels (himself a diabetic), Hamaspik was able to provide the individual with a high-tech insulin pump—her first—and teach her to properly use it.

"She's a pro at it now," says Mrs. Silberman, adding that her blood sugar levels are now "very much under control."

Mrs. Silberman proudly reports that the young lady's levels of A1C, a highly accurate long-term blood glucose level indicator, have likewise remarkably stabilized. One of her doctors even described her status as "magnificent," Mrs. Silberman recounts. "'You're my success story,'" she recalls the physician saying. "'I wish I had more patients like you.'"

The individual now not only lives comfortably now, functioning largely and confidently on her own and living happily with her husband, but has even become a volunteer diabetes coach.

Here's how that chapter unfolds.

Working in close quarters not just as co-workers but as likeminded confidantes, Mrs. Silberman and fellow MSC Mrs. Chedva Freund exchange not just ideas and tips, and not even just support and camaraderie, but all available resources—time and energy, know-how and heart—to help each other best benefit their serviced individuals with special needs.

Among the special-needs individuals in Mrs. Freund's portfolio

was a young lady receiving Nursing Home Transition/Diversion (NHTD) benefits. And like Mrs. Silberman's charge, she was also diabetic.

In their ongoing communicating and sharing a means towards a common end, Mrs. Silberman took up Mrs. Freund's suggestion to have "Individual A" assist "Individual B."

And so, using her Hamaspik-given diabetes-management skills to help others, Mrs. Silberman's client now provides insulin-pump training and coaching to Mrs. Freund's client.

"It's amazing," comments Mrs. Silberman on A's ongoing work with B. "She feels very comfortable helping her."

As a matter of fact, so comfortable are they working with each other, recounts Mrs. Freund with almost-motherly pride, that the two a friendly walk almost every night.

But it gets better.

The newly-tapped mentor, ever growing in her personal leadership skills, cajoled her new protegee to attend one of Rabbi Meisels' regular weekend support events for diabetics—with both coming away educated and rejuvenated.

"This can happen all over the place, and it should happen," says Mrs. Freund of the transformation of receiver into giver. "It's so beautiful to see."

And in perhaps the culmination of compliments, the mother of Individual B keeps calling the agency to offer her thanks, Mrs. Silberman adds.

But who knows? At the rate things are going, the second individual just may become a volunteer diabetes coach herself... ■

Plain English, better health

A study of 96 other studies found that low "health literacy," or difficulty understanding medical information, is linked with many types of poorer health outcomes and poorer use of health services.

The study found that:

- About 80 million Americans have limited health literacy
- Low health literacy was consistently linked with more hospitalization, greater use of ERs and a poor ability to take medicines correctly or understand labels and health messages

• Older people with low health literacy had overall worse health status and higher mortality rates

But patient health illiteracy is only one side of the coin—the other side is industry jargon.

According to Harvard School of Public Health senior lecturer Rima Rudd, caregivers simply don't speak plain English to patients.

Rudd advises saying something along these lines if you don't understand something: "I am sorry, but I haven't had your training. Can you use everyday words?" ■

Hamaspik of Orange County housing assistance

Hamaspik of Orange County's dogged teams of Medicaid Services Coordinators (MSCs) will leave no stone unturned when it comes to helping.

That's why, when MSCs learned of a rare opening in a New York State housing assistance program, they jumped at the opportunity.

The program in question, a long-time mainstay of the state's suite of social services, provides affordable housing to New York's most indigent.

For years, however, new funding slots for apartments and even homes subsidized by the program were few and far between. So when word came down that vouchers for apartments exclusively for individuals with special needs were soon to be made available, the MSCs took action.

Days and then weeks turned into over two months of tireless phone calls by MSCs Mrs. C.R. Weinberger and Ms. Faigy Lichter, until two precious appointments at local housing offices were secured.

And all that effort paid off.

Within three weeks of both

appointments, vouchers were authorized for two of the MSCs' individuals with special needs—proof positive that Hamaspik's MSCs truly bring the caring home... or to your low-rent apartment.

Florida check-up all part of a day's work

If part of taking care of your special-needs individuals' portfolio meant investing three months of work just to secure a ten-minute consultation with a top orthopedic surgeon a three-hour flight away from New York, would you do it?

At Hamaspik, the answer is the same as to the question, "Would you do it again?"

That was the query posed by the *Gazette* to the aforementioned Mrs. Weinberger—whose answer came readily: "Of course!"

That's why Mrs. Weinberger took great pains recently to arrange a medical trip to Florida for one of her precious young charges, a very medically-involved child who needed to consult with the same expert physician who had performed her com-

plex surgery a few years ago.

Mrs. Weinberger's hard work ensured that the very involved Medicaid and SSI recipient received the extra services covered by those programs precisely for situations like hers—airfare, ground transportation and even food.

Though less than 12 hours elapsed between the moment the child and her parents exited their upstate New York front door and reentered it by day's end, the whirlwind round trip was nevertheless worth it, Mrs. Weinberger reports. At the anticlimactically short visit, the surgeon informed the family of their daughter's continued stability and positive progress.

But for Hamaspik's endlessly

devoted MSCs, it's all part of a day's work. Says Mrs. Weinberger: "It's standard to go overboard."

Shower power

A Brooklyn resident receiving Hamaspik services recently had an Environmental Modification (E-Mod) arranged via the good offices of Hamaspik of Kings County MSC Shaya Ross.

Limited in life only by use of a wheelchair, the individual previously had to use a disabled-accessible local men's facility for personal hygiene, what with his own shower too small.

Thanks to his eligibility for the Hamaspik-secured E-Mod, the

Hamaspik MSCs: Here to Help

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young man now has the privacy and space required to care for himself in the privacy and comfort of his own home.

"This is exactly the point of the service," says Ross. "To accommodate individuals at home."

Culminating a months-long process, Mr. Ross also recently secured Medicaid approval for a seriously-needed motorized wheelchair for another individual—keeping quality service rolling.

What help sounds like

When it comes to helping individuals with special hearing needs, the name Alexander Graham Bell should, well, ring a bell.

That's because the Alexander Graham Bell Association, a non-profit that assists the hard of hearing with financial aid, recently approved an aid application for an eligible child in the caseload of Hamaspik of Rockland County MSC Mrs. Chana Singer—generously contributing a substantial boost towards the child's tuition.

"It is a lengthy process," says Mrs. Singer of a program only accepting applications in April, "but what don't we do for our consumers?" ■

Decade-Plus, Residence Manager Lives Mission since Day One

Pedagogical approach built on 18 years of teaching

Lipa Laufer's face is a study in weathered wisdom. He's the kind of person who can look at you and right through you—but in a disarming, charming way. One glance tells you he sees behind your eyes—but it's okay.

It's also what you'd expect from a veteran teacher, a former instructor of little kids.

That ability to keenly read people, an almost supernatural perceptiveness that pierces through affectations and penetrates to the soul, where the real you lurks, comes with years of classroom experience—an intuitive, acquired sense that sure comes in handy where you're in charge of a few dozen rowdy little tykes, and a sixth sense that makes you a masterful manager of fully-grown adults with special needs.

A visit by the *Gazette* one balmy afternoon in early August brings its editor face to face with this soft-spoken, spiritual man—but not before meeting Mrs. Laufer at the door of 121 Acres Road in Kiryas Joel, New York, home of Hamaspik of Orange

County's Acres Briderheim Individualized Residential Alternative (IRA).

The group home looks just like a regular house, I point out. "Because it's a real family!" rejoins Mrs. Laufer, completing the sentiment.

Inside, Mr. Laufer takes the *Gazette* around the home.

On the first of its two floors we enter a cozy recreation room. Several pieces of exercise equipment are placed about its floor, including a one-piece plastic chair of sorts that puts its occupant in a comfortable reclined position mere inches above the carpet.

"When I came here, all he wanted to do was sit here," states Mr. Laufer, first gesturing to an individual walking about the room and then to the unusual piece of furniture.

He then launches into the first of several monologues, streams of engaging personal ideology that combine practical know-how and wise convictions. "The first thing you must do is win their trust," says he.

In The World According to Laufer, there is no such thing as an individual not understanding what's being said, be that individual a grade-schooler or agency beneficiary. The veteran teacher, who taught First Grade in Sao Paulo, Brazil for three years before moving back to the States, is unshakably convinced of this: If a person understands not, it is his teacher or caregiver's fault, not his.

Upon arriving at Acres, where he has been employed since its January 2001 opening, Laufer rejected the conventional wisdom that among his new charges were individuals who could not be worked with. The teacher was in the classroom, and the teacher would lovingly lay down the law; the students were to comply.

And they did.

Mr. Laufer describes how the light of learning turned on in one young man's mind—how the gentlest of demurrals taught him to get out of his chair, amble over to the closet and point to the items on the

shelf he wanted instead of relying on habituated, long-accommodated grunts.

Others made remarkable progress after months if not years of learning to listen to Mr. Laufer, and Mr. Laufer capitalizing on a repertoire of trust.

Trust is the subject of another one of the teacher's expert lectures, this one delivered while we chat on the spacious second-story back porch.

That wooden balcony, beyond a hallway-end door, is heralded by several cozy bedrooms right and left, a collective avant garde to a backyard with lost-world-like privacy.

Overlooking the lush green oval hidden behind a tall ring of trees that wrap around to both sides of the house, Laufer waxes pedagogical, words flowing like a river. He speaks of respecting the intelligence of children and adults alike, of the finer points of positive reinforcement and disbursing incentives, of speaking to individuals with special needs as one would to anyone else.

And trust: A bracing, humble trust; an earnest, unfettered and innocent embrace of the other; a self-effacing reverence for the whole individual, habits, proclivities, strengths and shortcomings alike. This trust, a two-way street, must be established between teacher and student—or Home Manager and resident—if there is any progress to be had, Laufer insists.

These things Laufer more communicates than says; they come through between the raindrops of his words and can be heard in his interactions with the men who call Acres home.

We're now back downstairs heading to the front door. It's been about an hour. Several of the residents have just gotten off their bus and are now bustling in for their afternoon routines.

One individual, an effervescent young man I've met as a Hamaspik employee several times, goes out of his way to greet me. With not a trace of condescension in his voice, Mr. Laufer instructs him to tell me how his day was. The individual tells me, all innocence and sincerity. The Manager reminds him of additional details he'd forgotten, and the gentleman gladly elaborates.

A good teacher knows his students eminently well. And this one doesn't miss anything. ■

Middle-aged adults with parents a scant two decades or so older often assume mothers and fathers will be fine—an assumption reinforced by ever-improving public health.

That's why preparing for parental medical emergencies is low on adult children's priorities lists, if there at all.

"Because they have young children, they think their parents are young," notes Lauren Wieder, RN, a HamaspikCare field nurse who often works with older patients. "People only see their parents as aging because they're aging."

But that's all the more reason why children should take precautions upon reaching the life stage of raising their own families with erstwhile-healthy grandparents nearby: Better proactive than reactive.

What you can do

You don't have to wait for an emergency to address your parents' long-term care and wellbeing.

Start by compiling a short, handy slip listing your parents' primary medical information.

The slip—which you can keep on the fridge or in a purse—should list all prescriptions, allergies and primary care physicians, as well as their contact information.

The list should also include the number of your parents' pharmacy.

To harvest that information, stage a conversation with your parents—a daunting prospect but one that can be effected diplomatically if done right.

Because older parents often keep a certain dignity about them, espe-

cially if they are in good general health, they may become defensive if asked personal health questions.

Children should therefore open the talk by first expressing their love and concern for their parents, as well as assuring them of unconditional respect for their privacy. Kids can then explain their intentions.

Experts also note that the conversation must be conversational in tone—it should not sound like an interview or interrogation.

Alternatively, parents can compile this list themselves, keeping it in their own wallets, purses or some designated place that their kids know about and can access in the event of an emergency. This list should also include the next of kin to be notified.

But when should children have "the Talk" with aging parents?

While this can depend on parents' overall wellbeing, the general rule is: When the parent turns 70 or the child turns 40, whichever comes first—and if major or even minor health issues are beginning to crop up earlier, do it immediately.

"You have to be involved," says Wieder, asked how preparing in advance helps. As parents age, disease processes don't necessarily get better, she notes—and adult children must be in the know about them.

If a parent has heart disease, for example, Wieder suggests reviewing healthier menu options with them—

offering them healthier food and a parent/child bonding opportunity.

Children caring for older parents, especially those with chronic conditions, may also consider a medical alert device for their parents. This is essentially an emergency-signal transmitter with one large, easy-to-push button that is worn as a pendant or bracelet, putting it within easy reach in case of a fall or other medical emergency.

Bang for Baby Boomer bucks

With the Baby Boomer generation now entering retirement, a wave of older adults needing prolonged non-emergency care is already hitting the healthcare industry—a wave that is only expected to grow.

That care can range from 'round-the-clock on-site nursing to simple companionship and help with errands.

For many of these seniors, especially those with duly diagnosed disabilities, LHCSAs, or Licensed Home Care Services Agencies, like HamaspikCare can help.

In New York and other states, seniors on Medicare are entitled to skilled needs services through HamaspikCare. Said services, dubbed thusly for the trained skills of those who provide them, include on-site nursing, physical therapy (PT), occupational therapy (OT),

speech therapy and Home Health Aides (HHAs). All are purveyed under very strict Medicare rules and regulations.

Individuals receiving Medicaid may also be entitled to a number of services provided through HamaspikCare: nursing, PT, OT and speech therapy, social work, nutrition counseling, HHAs, Personal Care Aides (PCAs) and the Consumer Directed Personal Aide Program (CDPAP).

Additionally, for seniors who hold private insurance plans, HamaspikCare services may also be available through those plans too.

For parents with no insurance, the rate for in-home non-medical care is often overestimated.

For years, it has been viewed as an option for the rich. In reality, however, keeping seniors at home is often more economical than moving them to full-time care facilities.

For example, according to the 2009 MetLife Market Survey of Nursing Home, Assisted Living, Adult Day Services, and Home Care Costs, the national average hourly rate in 2009 for a homemaker or companion was \$19.

Regardless, paying out-of-pocket for in-house care services for your parents is far less expensive than full-time residence elsewhere. Nursing homes, for example, can cost several thousand a month. Keeping parents at home, by con-

trast, is not only cheaper, but allows beloved fathers and mothers to stay where they're most comfortable too.

Additionally, some states have mandates that allow immediate members of a family to quit their jobs to care for loved ones full-time—and be paid for it.

"Family members involved helps tremendously," points out Hamaspik Director of Operations Yoel Bernath, who also manages HamaspikCare, asked how adult children can best help HamaspikCare's aging clients.

"You need family members to help you get a clear picture," he adds—a statement that holds true regardless of the health status of the parent in question.

Pro-act, not procrastinate

Too often, those with aging parents believe they can put medical-crisis preparations off when things are fine. But the nature of an "emergency" means that the situation is unexpected—so, as the old saying goes, better safe than sorry.

Bottom line? "You can't watch them 24/7," says Wieder of caring for aging parents. Although each situation is different, "you should know what diagnoses they have."

Hopefully you'll never have to use a medical information slip. But if it should ever come to that, you'll be prepared. ■

Caring for aging parents—before you must

A HamaspikCare practical guide



LET IT SHINE

At Hamaspik's Day Habs, Spirits Soar in Summer Season

"Three great things about summer: June, July and August!" goes the old bumper sticker.

At Hamaspik's Day Habilitation programs, however, great things happen in quantities that far exceed three—and all year 'round too, not just in summertime.

So here's a review of what's been happening at the Day Habs of Hamaspik of Kings, Orange and Rockland Counties while the sun is at its hottest and the skies are at their bluest.

Hamaspik of Kings County

The Hamaspik of Kings County Day Hab program, under the inspired and energetic leadership of Manager Israel Lichtenstein and Assistant Manager Mrs. Elky Scher, has taken the summer bull by the horns, so to speak—taking full advantage of the lovely weather for a maximum amount of outings and trips in the great outdoors.

"Every day there's something else: something new's going on," says Mrs. Scher.

In her Division, the young Day Hab women have thus far enjoyed a summer themed by *brachos*, the traditional blessings recited for different categories of food—with matching activities for each.

For example, the "Mezonos" recitation said before eating baked goods inspired a

hands-on jumbo pretzel-making activity one fine Day Hab day. And to ensure that the "girls" know their stuff, an exciting written brachos test is being held each Friday, with the individual who recites the most brachos that week getting to select a snack of the category in question, plus a distinguished-looking certificate attesting to her knowledge.

Other weeks featured other blessing themes, like grapes and grape products—in particular, a mock wedding centered, like a real Jewish wedding, around seven blessings recited over a cup of wine. The individuals really loved it and are still talking about it, Mrs. Scher notes.

Asked about major activities, Mrs. Scher mentions swimming, outdoor sports, and trips. Specifically, the individuals enjoyed a July 7 trip to the Maritime Aquarium out in Connecticut, where the hands-on policy "was very exciting for them," says Mrs. Scher.

They also went the Blackbeard's Cave family fun center on July 14, where they had ample fun bumper boating, paintball shooting and go-carting—and likewise having a great time at The Fun Castle, another popular such center in Chester, New York, on July 21.

And for something completely "wild," the individuals thrilled to the lions, tigers, bears and other wild animals on display at the Philadelphia Zoo, a grand trip on July 28 that is surprisingly not that long of a drive, Mrs. Scher reports.

August saw the individuals having great times at the Quassy Amusement Park on the 11th of the month, an August 18th trip to Bear Mountain State Park, and a breathtaking whale watching voyage on the 26th off the shores of Connecticut.

Throughout the summer, Mrs. Scher adds, individuals' health was diligently tended to, especially in the sometimes-excessive heat. In particular, Mrs. Scher and staff came up with a fun way to ensure that each individual drank eight cups of water a day—by giving each a sticker for each cup downed, and a prize for anyone earning six or more stickers by day's end, thus ensuring they remained hydrated in high temperatures.

As Mrs. Scher says, "It's hot this year."

So what's been the most exciting thing this summer for the individuals?

"They loved the outings," the Assistant Manager begins, adding: "The excitement of coming in each Monday to find out what the brachah, and the activity for the brachah, for the week, will be. It really improved not only their knowledge of what food gets what brachah but they are also now more aware and remember to say brachos out loud before eating. It's a real accomplishment."

Hamaspik of Orange County

The Woman's Division of Hamaspik's Day Hab program has been rollicking along since summer's start—with its joy-themed Rock Besimcha initiative.

"Rock" coincides coincidentally with "rahk," which in classic Jewish liturgy is the adverb for "just" or "only"—rendering Rock Besimcha "only with happiness," a profound lesson for life. ("Simcha" means "happiness" or "joy"—a word referring to that sense of personal fulfillment, or any joyous lifecycle event like a new baby, a wedding or a birthday.)

But the wordplay can also leave the English verb intact, making "Rock Besimcha" a bilingual imperative, as the vernacular goes, to live all of life vigorously using a tool called happiness.

Semantics notwithstanding, the many meanings of simcha were not lost on the "Day Habbbers," with their program reflagged "Camp Rock Besimcha," catchy logo and all, starting July 1st.

Like the season itself, Camp Rock Besimcha is different than the regular Day Hab program by virtue of its heightened energy and excitement, explains Manager Mrs. Chumy Niederman.

While all standard Day Hab entries remain intact—such staples as its "Centers" sensory-stimulation workshops, music, sewing, and Library Time—Rock Besimcha makes the daily program "much more upbeat," Mrs. Niederman tells the *Gazette*.

That upbeat spirit marks each morning with a song immediately following breakfast, setting the tone for the entire day—a day filled with "a lot of outings" and outdoor recreational activities, Mrs. Niederman continues.

Among those outdoor activities were "exchange camper" visits between Camp Rock Besimcha and Camp Tubby, for generations a popular Jewish girls camp. Rock Besimcha first visited Tubby and then vice versa, with the camaraderie culminating in a hockey game that had everyone cheering from the sidelines.

Putting a tangible touch to the simcha theme are Rock Besimcha's weekly lifecycle arts and crafts projects.

One week had the "campers" baking black-and-white cookies resembling three-year-old boys, complete with "side locks" added on; in the Jewish community, male tots go unshorn until their third birthdays, at which point they are ceremonially inducted into childhood with family members each snipping

a lock of hair.

The party, known by the Yiddish noun upshernish (for "cutting"), was replicated at Camp Rock Besimcha, with staffers playing the parts of the adoring parents, grandparents, family and friends usually attending upshernishes. Rock Besimcha-goers even had prepared adorable themed goodie bags, as well as napkins hand-decorated with the number 3.

Other weekly hands-on endeavors have revolved around such life milestones as new baby boys or girls (specifically, the Kiddush sit-down meal celebrating their arrivals). Camp Rock Besimcha even hosted a mock Hachnosas Sefer Torah (Torah-scroll induction) together with a local girls' day camp.

But besides all the summer fun, "Day Habbbers" are also enjoying their full complement of regular activities, Mr. Niederman notes, with the manager not wanting her charges to lose their momentum vis-a-vis ongoing sensory stimulation.

"We just had pinatas," she says—a project that involved not just smashing the candy-filled animal figurines but painstakingly forming them out of thick paper sheets too.

Camp Rock Besimcha concluded by the end of August.

Still, Camp Rock Besimcha was only Act II in an already supercharged summer. Beginning in early June, the young women and their Direct Support Professionals switched to summer mode, with the first of weekly swim sessions taking place on Monday, June 13 and season-themed sensory educational activities like "Parachute," making wind socks out of ordinary arts and crafts items and scrapbooking filling their days from that point on.

Other activities included a bowling trip, workouts in the Admin/Day Hab building's exercise room, making colorful and delicious slush ices, and even a round of volleyball at Mrs. Niederman's home.

For his part, Men's Division Manager Mr. Eliezer Appel worked hard to ensure his charges' stimulating summer—and to see to it that the carefree spirit of the summer has nothing but a positive effect on the individuals' otherwise rigorous daily schedule.

"I'm making sure everything we're doing is going in a good direction," says the tireless Hamaspik leader.

Said daily schedule includes therapeutic and skills-building daily outings to several local job sites, trips off-site for enjoyable barbeque picnics and swims—and a full array of indoor games that enhance body and mind alike.

On a scale of one to ten, with ten being the ultimate, Appel says his program easily takes a seven or eight.

Hamaspik of Rockland County

Like its fellow programs, Hamaspik of Rockland County's Day Hab program unofficially kicked off its summer season immediately after the Shavuot holiday, which fell this



Stepping up: Visiting a friend



Beached: The Rockland County Men's Division enjoying a sunny shore

Continued on Page E5

Continued from Page 4

year on June 8-9.

The season started with birthday parties for individuals Eliezer F. and Mendy K., both of whom were feted with live music, great food and a festive spirit. And while participants Moshe R., Shloimy S. and Shlomo T. left the Day Hab around the same time to attend summer camp, staff kept individuals' spirits up with yet another fabulous trip to nearby Montvale Lanes—where, according to staff, the "Day Habbers'" bowling skills are ever improving.

In late June, the Day Hab celebrated the arrival of two new participants, Shimon G. and Pinchas K., both of whom recently graduated their special schools to join the Day Hab full time. "WE R SO GLAD TO HAVE U JOIN US!" read a whimsical welcoming banner in the dining room.

Also marking the last week of June was the mounting of a very season-appropriate (and regulation-size) volleyball net in the parking lot by versatile Maintenance Manager Jacob "Yanky" Weiss. The "boys" were soon seen passing a volleyball back and forth and negotiating the game to the best of their abilities. That same week was also marked by an outing to the beautiful Croton Dam Falls.

With the onset of July and remarkably warm (read: hot!) weather came a flurry of outdoor activities at the Men's Division (though the individuals were kept indoors throughout the "heat dome" scorcher that roasted much of the U.S. at the time). With the high temperatures also came weekly swimming sessions.

Additional activities marking the remainder of the month included an exhilarating go-carting trip, another visit to Croton Dam Falls, therapeutic horseback riding, a visit to a picturesque lake (pictured on last month's *Gazette* front cover), and a visit to Monsey's M&T Bank, where personal accounts are diligently maintained for the individuals.

A July highlight was had with a daylong trip to the Catskills, where the individuals visited Moshe R. and Shloimy S. on July 17 for the official Visiting Day at Camp HASC, where they were spending a few weeks. Moshe, Shloimy and their friends enjoyed the rides, games and other carnival attractions set

up by HASC's excellent staff for campers and visitors alike.

July came to a rousing close with its last week seeing beloved Day Hab participant Eliezer Friedrich visiting Spring Valley Mayor Noramie Jasmine, Village Judge Allen Simon and other officials at their offices. Mr. Friedrich is an avid political raconteur whose personal relationships with numerous public servants include former President George W. Bush, and which have been covered in past *Gazette* issues.

The month also closed out with all the regular activities, including arts 'n' crafts, therapy, daily Torah study sessions, exercise, indoor games, shopping outings and swimming—all capped by a stimulating trip to Ringwood State Park, where the "boys" enjoyed the natural scenery and a pleasant row boating excursion.

As for the Women's Division, summer was positively sunny.

As mentioned in our "Happenings Around Hamaspik" column of last month (*Gazette* #87), the Women's Division rolled out its new in-house newsletter in early July—chock-full of goings-on including an outing to a secluded beach in beautiful Deal, New Jersey and birthday parties for two individuals. Manager Mrs. E.R. Kresch was also sent an adorable baby gift by the individuals, complete with homemade cookies, to celebrate her family's newest addition.

The remainder of July was filled with no shortage of standard skills-building activities, including meal preparation, housecleaning, reading, writing, math, personal budgeting and money management, social skills and even plant watering.

Of course, in keeping with the summer spirit, the "Day Habbers" also regularly went swimming and enjoyed weekly trips, which included a fun visit to an area Chuck E. Cheese indoor family fun center. They also staged a surprise cheesecake-themed welcome-back party for Mrs. Kresch upon her return and celebrated individual Chumy's birthday with an ice-cream-themed party.

The month closed with an exhilarating "championship" on the Day Hab's backyard volleyball court, another bowling outing, a birthday party for individual Chany... plus the surprise engagement announcement of a beloved Direct Support Professional.

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And a spectacular summer was closed out in August with the successful results of an unannounced audit, in which surveyors were most pleasantly surprised and positively impressed with Hamaspik's usual standards of quality care and loving compassion provided each individual.

Summery

Trips, games, sports, outings, picnics and all-around good clean fun: when it comes to summer, all of that just about sums it up—if you ask a Hamaspik Day Habilitation client or staff member, that is.

Hamaspik of Rockland County EI classroom program growing

Dramatic increase indicates agency reach, program effectiveness

Few things positively impact the future of a child with developmental delays than a quality present.

As this writer, himself a parent of two children with developmental delays, has seen first-hand, the loving and attentive therapy provided by New York State's Early Intervention (EI) program is comparable to planting seeds that take some time to germinate.

Till the soil, water the plant site, and trim weeds punctiliously. Repeat daily for months.

Nothing happens—or so it seems.

But suddenly, shoots appear, leaves unfurl and a lovely young tree

springs to life before your eyes, its rapid rate of growth almost compensating for the months of barren silence.

That's the story of every developmentally-delayed child successfully aided by EI, a story recorded in

various articles on these pages over the past months and years. And at Hamaspik of Rockland County's EI classroom program—a state-of-the-art, cutting-edge boon to children who have yet to speak or properly wield a crayon—what was once a



sullen patch of earth is now not just a flourishing sign of life but a veritable garden.

The classroom program, located on the premises of the Kakiat Middle School initially opened in January of 2010 with less than a handful of kids.

Under the leadership and proficiency of EI teacher Mrs. Reizy Weichbrod and assistant Bruchy Deutsch, the EI program has grown by leaps and bounds in recent weeks, its attendance numbers curving up almost like the growth of its students themselves.

The program is attracting new students because "people used to think that Hamaspik is [only] for disabled kids, but now they see it's integrated," says a Hamaspik staffer.

"Program growth is due to the fact that we now have more satisfied parents and professionals that can bear witness to the success of children presently attending and those who have transitioned on who will vouch for the warmth and dedication of the staff at Kinderland," writes

Mrs. Lalouch, Hamaspik of Rockland County's EI Director, in an e-mail to the *Gazette*.

Conveying Hamaspik's meticulous attention to detail and specific individuals' need, the EI program recently even hired an assistant fluent in four languages, including Arabic, the best to tend to a young developmentally-delayed member of Rockland County's growing Middle Eastern Jewish community.

"One parent that called to inquire about the program said that she asked one of our parents about the program, and that parent could not stop raving about the teacher and staff at Kinderland," continues Lalouch. "Positive first-hand experience is the best advertisement ever. At this point the results speak for themselves."

"As long as there's a need, there's growth," says Hamaspik Director of Community Affairs Joseph Landau in a conversation with the *Gazette*. "It's an investment for the future."

Commiss. Burke visits Hamaspik

Continued from Page 1

Wertheimer. The two chatted and shortly joined the OPWDD's regional contingent—Hudson Valley DDSO Director and longtime Hamaspik friend Michael Kirschmer and top lieutenants Jackie Spring and Eileen Wood—on a hands-on tour.

The group first popped in on Hamaspik of Orange County's Early Intervention (EI) Program, where a sizable group of tiny tots were engaged in their daily therapeutic activities.

They proceeded from there to the agency's flourishing Respite program. Dubbed Camp Neshoma (Soul), the seasonal state program tends to its precious young souls by providing quality day programming for special-needs youth while school is out for the summer.

It was in Respite that Ms. Burke found time for some soulful bonding with the most innocent among us, actually seating herself on the floor (a Hamaspik-visitor first, Katina later said) among the beautiful children to pose for an impromptu portrait.

The Commissioner and her entourage then briefly visited the Men's and Women's Divisions of Hamaspik of Orange County's Day Hab program, where they observed function-delineated groups variously engaged in physical exercise, stimulating games or Torah study.

Part of Ms. Burke's visit including conversing amiably with a number of individuals to learn their daily schedules and what activities they were engaged in at the moment.

As Zishe Lowy conveys it, the Commissioner came across as approachable and easygoing.

According to the Hamaspik of Rockland County Director of Day Services, who tagged along for at least part of her building tour, Burke "mingled very well between all of us—just a friendly, nice person."

"She was pleasantly surprised by the whole agency—you saw it on

her face," Hamaspik of Orange County Director of Day Services Joel Friedman tells the *Gazette*. "We do it every day, but for her, it was the first time seeing such a rich curriculum."

Friedman also expressed pride in the programs' efficiency and effectiveness, stressing that what the Commissioner saw on that Thursday was what the *Gazette*—or any visitor, for that matter—would see any other day.

Doing lunch

The luncheon that followed Ms. Burke's first-hand tour began at 11:30 a.m., with longtime event emcee Brenda Katina taking to the podium like a masterful captain at a ship's helm.

"Welcome to Hamaspik, an agency built on bones," she opened. "Yes, you heard me right."

Katina went on to express her "honor" to work for Hamaspik for the past two decades, then defining the mentioned bones as the wishbone, the jawbone and the backbone, respectively communicating as they do the dreams, the communications skills and the resolve that are at the collective core of Hamaspik's track record of success.

"As long as our bones are in order, we can go forward," said Katina.

The Master of Ceremonies then introduced Mr. Wertheimer.

The agency's founding chief executive first warmly welcomed Ms. Burke, extending an invitation to "join the family" on his own behalf and that of the agency's too—a family, he continued, that included the Hudson Valley DDSO leaders present, whom he then mentioned by name.

Mr. Wertheimer then touched upon the engine at the core of Hamaspik, the elite teams of Medicaid Services Coordinators (MSC) who, as he described them, incorporate genuine compassion and concern for their charge into their

daily work.

Ultimately, Mr. Wertheimer posited, there is no such thing as a "Medicaid Services Coordinator"—because that label hardly describes the extraordinary work done every day by Hamaspik's MSC staff.

"They feel the pain" of the individuals they serve and their families alike, Wertheimer continued—so much so that this effective empathy for others, as a trademark if unwritten corporate philosophy, is now modeled by other agencies too.

The Hamaspik leader then highlighted the impressive fiscal austerity generated by the Hamaspik MSCs' work, securing as they do endless grants and other sources of non-public funding with which to provide critically-needed services and programs for individuals with special needs.

Mr. Wertheimer concluded with a brief mention of Gov. Cuomo's Medicaid Redesign Team (MRT), offering Hamaspik's successful MSC model as a cost-saving complement to the MRT's designs for the state/federal program.

Mrs. Katina returned to the podium again to introduce Hamaspik of Kings County Executive Director Joel Freund.

The young, dynamic leader warmly welcomed Ms. Burke again, offering an additional welcome on behalf of NYSHA, or the New York State Hamaspik Association, which Mr. Freund also serves as its Executive Director. He thanked the Commissioner for taking the time from her busy schedule to visit Hamaspik.

A very touching moment then ensued as 13-year-old Yossi Katina, a child placed in Family Care over a decade ago thanks to the good offices of Michael Kirschmer, presented Mr. Kirschmer with a bouquet of flowers.

Mr. Kirschmer then took the floor briefly to thank Hamaspik for the welcome and the gift. He took note of the "friendship and partnership" developed with Hamaspik over



Family in so many ways: Wertheimer and Kirschmer with a new family Care recipient

the decades, adding that he was "truly proud to part of the greater Hamaspik family."

"Thank you for doing it all with excellence," he concluded to robust applause.

Popular and much-beloved Hamaspik beneficiary Rabbi Shmuel Muller next addressed the crowd, welcoming the Commissioner in his inimitable style and thanking Hamaspik and, by extension, the OPWDD, for everything it does, concluding with a thrice-stated thank-you that thrilled the crowd.

A Family Care provider from the Kiryas Joel community was then called upon to address the assemblage in English—which, affably noted Emcee Katina in her introduction, is the mother's fourth language. The mother's message, delivered in an articulate foreign lilt, thanked Hamaspik and the OPWDD for everything the program gave her.

Hamaspik's fast-paced, impressive new introduction video was then played, with many in the crowd seeing it for the first time and truly coming to appreciate the size and scope of services rendered by the human-services agency across such a wide swath of needs.

Yossi Katina, speaking through the mouth of Brenda Katina, shared a delightful message that communicated, among many other things, that "all my needs are met" by Hamaspik's Family Care program. He then took the mike to personally utter a heartfelt "thank you!" that was heard by all... in more ways than one.

Mrs. Katina next presented Commissioner Burke with a gift crackling with positive symbolism: an elegant set of dominoes. With her trademark smile, the Emcee took note of the fact that "everything you do in Albany has a domino effect."

Ms. Burke was then invited to share a few words.

Speaking freely from the heart, the Commissioner thanked Hamaspik for "the warmest welcome I have ever received," moving on to her tectonic analogy.

Validating remarks made earlier, Burke said that the Hamaspik programs she witnessed that day truly are a model—an observation based on the love she claimed to have felt in the rooms visited.

"You can tell from coming here," she explained, adding: "I will never forget my experiences here today."

Ms. Burke concluded her remarks by assuring the agency that "I look forward to working with you in the future," evoking genuine applause.

On a roll

After the event, in a minivan heading back to Monsey via the New York State Thruway, a group of Hamaspik of Rockland County employees (including this writer) found themselves behind a white Altima with a New York State government license plate.

Looking closer, they recognized the same vehicle that had been parked in Hamaspik of Orange County's lot earlier that day.

The two cars approached the highway's north-south fork, with the Hamaspik contingent heading right to Rockland County and the Nissan turning left for its return to Albany.

Spirits inside the minivan were buoyant after the rallying luncheon, and probably were inside the car carrying Commissioner Courtney Burke too. And at both destinations, a renewed commitment to the mission of putting people first is sure to continue. ■



From the heart: Freund (l), Wertheimer (c), Muller (r)

Hamaspik Remembers

Continued from Page 1

accurately recall when and where he or she heard “the news,” a day that created a “before” and “after” on a scale not experienced since Pearl Harbor, the Gazette spoke with several Hamaspik veterans working at the agency on that day in September—to hear their memories, to listen to their experience.

A decade has passed, but their memories of September 11—and ours—have not changed.

*

The agency ran like a Swiss watch that morning.

The clock read 8:46 a.m.

In the yard of Acres Biederheim stood Home Manager Lipa Laufer, then a live-in staffer, watching a landscaper tend to the grass and hedges.

On the back steps of the Seven Springs Shvesterheim stood David Daskal, then as now Hamaspik of Orange County’s Maintenance Manager, taking a precise measurement for a sukkah frame soon to be built for the residence.

A Hamaspik van piloted by Eliezer Farkash zipped westbound along the New York State Thruway. A Hamaspik Transportation Coordinator to this day, Farkash was driving a Dinev Inzerheim resident and accompanying staff to an important doctor appointment on Staten Island.

A Monsey Tours commuter charter bus was making its way from Brooklyn to Rockland County along the highways and byways of New Jersey, carrying longtime Hamaspik Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC) Mrs. Zelma Feldman to another day at work upstate.

As the 9:00 a.m. hour drew closer, Hamaspik’s Monsey and Kiryas Joel offices blinked into life. Computers flickered on. Light switches were flipped. Papers were shuffled. Coffee cups were filled. Phone numbers were dialed. Meetings were planned.

Boom.

A second plane hit the Twin Towers. Now it was official: America was under attack. The world shuddered—and the aftershocks continue to reverberate to this day.

*

Hamaspik felt the shudder immediately in the form of shocked employees, plans that were changed if not canceled altogether, and shock among a number of individuals served (not to mention the young men and women who served as their Direct Support staff at their residences).

From her seat on the Monsey Tours bus, Feldman and the other passengers could clearly see the black cloud billowing from Ground Zero. Cell phones, however, were not as prevalent then as they are today—and so, the driver hailed his dispatcher by radio to ask about the

smoke.

“Something happened by the Twin Towers,” came the response.

The bus was still in the city. The passengers were very nervous. But it occurred to no one to stay in town in case of travel disruptions. Thus the bus arrived in Monsey.

The MSCs quickly learned what had happened and tried to keep their heads about them—but they, like all other Hamaspik staffers, and everyone else, couldn’t mentally stay put. Little work was done that day.

Naturally, that work day ended earlier. But there was no getting home for Hamaspik’s Brooklyn-residing employees, Feldman and others. It was a nightmare: No buses. No bridges. No entry to the city. Feldman tried arranging a ride. But New York was sealed shut.

Mrs. Feldman ended up staying the night at a Monsey relative—if sleep was possible that anguished night away from home. She somehow found a way back to Brooklyn the next morning.

*

In the Hamaspik van, Farkash was almost at the end of New Jersey’s Route 4, approaching the George Washington Bridge, as the

unprecedented wave of terror began unfolding on American soil.

Farkash had no idea of what was playing out just a few miles to his right. But the image came up black and crisp before his eyes as the vehicle rolled across the bridge, the dark smoke rising from lower Manhattan to the heavens. And before he could internalize anything, traffic suddenly came to a complete stop.

Mere moments earlier, Mayor Rudy Giuliani had ordered the complete lockdown of Manhattan, putting the island under a virtual hermetic seal. Police reacted swiftly, and on the bridge, vehicular access to and from the city was near-instantly denied.

With no one leaving the city now, the bridge’s westbound lanes were eerily empty, allowing police to turn eastbound drivers around mid-span and head back the way they came, bewildered and stunned.

Naturally, the appointment for Farkash’s passenger was rescheduled for another date, at which the child received all required care.

For his part, after getting the individual safely back home to Dinev, Farkash immediately roared off back to Manhattan—this time

with a contingent of Kiryas Joel’s rapid-response volunteer medics on board, to help however they could.

*

At the Seven Springs Shvesterheim, Daskal continued his sukkah-building work, blissfully ignorant of the madness that had engulfed Manhattan—when a temporary worker on-site informed him of the terror attacks. The news didn’t affect his work at first, Daskal recalls. He continued measuring, setting up the sukkah as fast as possible.

Later, after the attacks truly sank in, Daskal reports that he had trouble getting any work done, as did most people. But at the moment, the Maintenance Manager figured that the joyous holiday of Sukkos dare not be disturbed because of some terrorist.

*

At Acres, as the backyard was being mowed, the landscaping crew’s foreman came over to relay what his truck’s radio had told him: America had come under attack.

Like everyone else, Mr. Laufer and his charges were very scared, not just because of the attacks but because of what might come next—especially since every minute brought a report of another plane or related incident: The State Department. The Congress. The

Pentagon. The White House. A field in Pennsylvania. Dear G-d...

Acres’ residents, in all spiritual innocence, concluded this could only mean the Messiah was coming—a reinvigorated faith that carries forward among them to this day. One even called home to tell his family to get ready for the great event, then broke out a Tehilim (Psalms) and prayed with a fervor that he maintains to this day.

The South 9th Inzerheim opened its doors in winter of 2001, a scant few months after the terror attacks. Naturally, then, plans to get the IRA running were in full swing during the previous summer, recalls Mrs. Malky Cziment, tapped only months earlier as South 9th’s then-future Home Manager—a position she still holds.

September 11, thus, didn’t have any direct effect on the Inzerheim. But it did postpone several meetings with the parents of a few children slated for residence in the home, as well as slated inspections by government officials that would eventually give South 9th the green light to ultimately open.

*

Back at the Dinev Inzerheim upstate, chaos reigned supreme. Gripped by fright and anguish, staff didn’t know what the next few hours might bring.

One staffer was in phone contact with a family member on a roof in Williamsburg, from which the flaming catastrophe could be clearly viewed over the East River. The family member provided Dinev with live updates.

*

It was in early 2002 that two longtime Hamaspik of Orange County employees, Mrs. Brenda Katina and Mrs. Leah Klar, found themselves in need of additional OPWDD (then OMRDD) training in lower Manhattan, where an OPWDD office was located.

Security was airtight in the area. Photo IDs were required from any pedestrian attempting entry. Katina and Klar had been unaware of the requirement, however—and on that day of all days, both somehow had no photo identification on them.

Thinking quickly, Klar produced a photo of a Rebbe from her wallet; religious Jews commonly carry photographs of spiritual leaders both present and past for personal inspiration.

Somehow, the photo of Grand Rabbi Yeshaya Kastirer (d. 1925) was good enough for the member of New York’s Finest standing guard, and the twosome were waved through.

But the incident revolved around not just a small photo but the bigger picture.

In the aftermath of the horror emerged a thousand stories of hope—tales of improbable survival, of complete strangers helping each other, of loved ones feared dead calling or coming home... and of faith in something bigger, better and greater than us.

Hospital Rounds

News and other hospital facts you didn't know

Robotic medicine: Demand? Or supply?

A study of Wisconsin hospitals found that after the hospitals purchased \$2 million robotic surgical technology, the quantity of prostate surgeries performed doubled within three months. The number of the same surgeries at hospitals without the robots remained the same.

The increase begs the question whether the demand—patients who actually needed robotic surgery and not other prostate-cancer treatments—drove the purchase of the robots, or whether the purchase of the robots generated more recommendations for their use.

The same question, incidentally, also applies to frequently-expensive computerized tomography (CT) and magnetic-resonance imaging (MRI) machines and other costly biomedical technology.

The high cost of purchasing, operating and maintaining said devices figures prominently in the ongoing healthcare costs debate, a key social-justice goal of the Obama administration. Many experts cite them in explaining still-skyrocketing health insurance premiums.

According to the study, the hospitals in question did over 10,000 prostate removal surgeries from 2002 to 2008, with one in four buying the robot in that time too.

Tellingly, however, were the 1,760 prostates removed in 2007

compared to 2002’s 1,400: Fewer men had prostate cancer in 2007.

Questions of economically-motivated usage are further underscored by most evidence indicating that robotic prostate surgery is no more effective in saving lives than traditional surgery, despite 75 percent of hospitals using the robots nowadays.

The study concluded that patient demand, driven by aggressive marketing of robotic technology by both manufacturers and hospitals, is at least partially to blame.

Low survival rate for in-hospital cardiac arrest

A study has found that of the 200,000-plus estimated cases of cardiac arrest among U.S. hospital patients each year, only 21 percent, or 42,000 survive. (Only ten percent survive cardiac arrests outside hospitals.) That number could improve with more effective patient monitoring, faster administration of CPR and defibrillation, and better adherence to resuscitation guidelines, the study added.

Cotton swabs help prevent surgical site infections

A study initiated by a Cedars-Sinai Medical Center surgeon has found that using dry cotton swabs instead of the standard iodine to gently probe incision sites dramatically reduces surgical site infections.

The study of appendectomy patients found that only three percent of patients getting daily cotton-swabbings developed surgical site infections, while 19 percent getting “iodined” did.

Patients in the cotton swab group also had less postoperative pain, shorter hospital stays (five versus seven days), and better cosmetic healing of their incisions, according to the study.

Researchers believe that probing incision sites with dry cotton swabs enables the drainage of contaminated fluid trapped within soft tissues—possibly reducing bacteria in the wound while maintaining the moist environment needed for successful wound healing.

Over 500,000 surgical site infections occur in the U.S. annually, accounting for nearly 25 percent of hospital-acquired infections and a major cause of illness and death in hospital patients.

16 hours for new docs

“First-year residents”—in plain English, MDs working their first post-graduation year in hospitals—are limited to 16-hour shifts as of July 1, 2011. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), the body that oversees residency training, issued the new rules in September 2010, citing statistics that up to 180,000 die each year in hospital errors.



In the Know

All about... acid reflux disease

“Enough already! You’re giving me heartburn!”

How many times have we heard statements like that?

Heartburn, a widespread phenomenon, is often associated with pesky people or stressful situations.

But that’s an abstract, almost-poetic usage of the phrase. Medically speaking, heartburn has nothing to do with the heart: It is the primary symptom of *acid reflux disease*. And while this condition can be made worse or even brought on by stress or anxiety, heartburn usually has little to do with emotions.

But what exactly is acid reflux disease? What causes it? And what can be done to prevent it? The Gazette takes a look.

Definition

Acid reflux is stomach acid (with or without bile) rising from the digestive system into the *esophagus*, or food pipe, creating a burning, painful sensation in the chest or even throat, and sometimes even backing up into the mouth. Acid reflux pain is often worse when lying down or bending over.

Occasional acid reflux is common and no cause for alarm. Most people can manage the discomfort of acid reflux on their own with lifestyle changes and over-the-counter medications.

More frequent acid reflux that interferes with daily routines in adults or children may be a symptom of something more serious that requires help from a doctor, like *gastroesophageal reflux disease*, or

GERD.

GERD is simply acid reflux that occurs frequently and interferes with daily life. GERD is generally defined (and diagnosed) as acid reflux that happens more than twice weekly.

Symptoms

Acid reflux can cause any level or combination of the following:

- A burning pain in the chest, sometimes severe (and enough to be mistaken for a heart attack, see below) that usually occurs after eating and may occur at night. Also known as *acid indigestion*
- Pain that worsens when lying down or bending over
- Burning pain or discomfort in the throat
- Sour or bitter-tasting acid in the mouth

Other symptoms of acid reflux may include:

- Asthma (caused by acid irritation of the esophagus, in turn releasing hormones that promote spasm of the bronchial tree and thus trigger an attack)
- Barrett’s Esophagus (caused by change in esophagus lining cells resulting from chronic injury to the lining; carries a very small risk of developing esophageal cancer)
- Cell changes can occur with dysphagia (see below) and can then also develop into cancer
- Bloating (usually after eating)
- Belching (often that doesn’t stop easily)
- Difficulty or pain with swallowing
- Dysphagia (difficulty with food passing through the esophagus,

which can result from scarring and narrowing of the esophagus caused by chronic acid-reflux irritation)

- Earaches
- Esophagitis (inflammation of the esophagus lining)
- Nausea (usually after eating)
- Regurgitation
- Shortness of breath (only if chronic lung disease develops)
- Sweat outbreaks (especially during acid-reflux pain bouts)
- Wheezing, dry cough, hoarseness, chronic sore throat or other asthma-like symptoms

Acid reflux does strike children too, usually infants, but most cases of infant acid reflux clear up on their own. Ask your pediatrician how to tell if and when infant acid reflux is a serious problem.

Acid reflux or heart attack?

Because of its sometimes-severe chest pain, people sometimes confuse acid reflux symptoms for a heart attack (or vice versa). Chest pain is one of the most common reasons for ER visits—and while many patients are indeed suffering heart attacks, some are actually just having severe heartburn. So when in doubt, call your doctor—but call 9-1-1 immediately if you have any of these symptoms of heart attack:

- Chest pain, tightness, pressure, or fullness lasting more than a few minutes or that goes away and comes back
- Pain or discomfort in your neck, shoulder, or jaw
- Shortness of breath, with or without chest pain
- Dizziness, lightheadedness, or nausea
- Sweating along with chest pain

These symptoms generally do not occur with acid reflux.

Causes

Acid reflux occurs when stomach acid backs up into the esophagus.

The “trapdoor” at the bottom of the esophagus, a circular band of muscle called the *lower esophageal sphincter* (LES), opens to let food and drink into the stomach when you swallow. Once you’re done, it tightens shut again. But if the “trapdoor” gets weak, or if it opens at the wrong times, stomach acid can flow back up (reflux) into the esophagus, whose sensitive lining reacts strongly (and painfully) to the acid. Because of gravity, acid-caused heartburn can be worse if you’re lying down or bent over.

Two underlying problems can make a malfunctioning LES worse: too much food in the stomach (overeating) or too much pressure on the stomach (frequently from obesity).

Certain food items are known to relax the LES, thus allowing acid back-up. These include alcohol, chocolate, garlic, onions, peppermint and fats.

Caffeine, while not relaxing the LES, does increase stomach acid production and thus may exacerbate acid reflux. Likewise, citrus fruits and tomatoes may aggravate symptoms due to their weakly acidic nature, which can further irritate the esophageal lining.

Stress doesn’t directly cause heartburn, but it can increase sensitivity to acid reflux—resulting in increased awareness and intolerance

of acid-reflux symptoms.

Smoking, which relaxes the LES and stimulates stomach acid, is a major contributor.

Another cause of heartburn can be the upper part of the stomach (along with the “trapdoor”) moving out of place, allowing acid to more readily back up into the esophagus. This is called *hiatal hernia*.

In some cases, *gastritis*, or inflammation of the stomach lining, may be involved. Other uncommon causes include connective tissue disorders like *scleroderma*, or *Zollinger-Ellison syndrome*.

Additionally, certain muscle relaxants or blood pressure medications can cause acid reflux, as well as bladder relaxants and drugs containing anticholinergic agents (some antidepressants and asthma bronchodilators).

Diagnosis

Occasional acid reflux isn’t dangerous.

Chronic heartburn, however, can indicate serious problems and can develop into GERD. Heartburn is a daily occurrence for about 10 percent of Americans and an occasional occurrence for about 30 percent of the population.

See your doctor if your acid reflux becomes more frequent or no longer responds to over-the-counter medications—or, more importantly, doesn’t respond to diet and/or lifestyle changes. Your doctor may recommend you see a doctor who specializes in treating digestive diseases (gastroenterologist).

Before you see your doctor, do the following:

- Ask before the appointment if there are any diet restrictions required before the appointment

- Write down any symptoms, including any that may seem unrelated to heartburn or GERD

- Write down key personal information, including any major stresses or recent life changes

- Make a list of all medications, vitamins or supplements that you're taking

- Make a list of questions for your doctor, from most to least important. This will save time and also get the most important questions answered first

Here are some heartburn questions to ask your doctor:

- What's causing my heartburn?
- What kinds of tests might I need?

- Will I need an endoscopic exam?

- Is this temporary or chronic?
- What is the best course of action?

- Are there any alternatives to your suggested course of action?

- I have these other health conditions. How can I best manage them with my heartburn?

- Are there any restrictions that I need to follow?

- Should I see a specialist? What will that cost, and will my insurance cover it?

- Is there a generic alternative to that prescription?

- Do you have some printed material I can take home with me? What information source do you recommend?

- Should I schedule a follow-up visit?

Here are some questions your doctor may ask you (for which you may want to prepare answers):

- What are your symptoms?

- When did you first notice these symptoms?

- Have your symptoms been continuous or occasional?

- How severe are your symptoms?

- What, if anything, seems to improve your symptoms?

- What, if anything, seems to worsen your symptoms?

- Do your symptoms wake you up at night?

- Are your symptoms worse after meals or after lying down?

- Do your symptoms include nausea or vomiting?

- Does food or sour material ever come up in the back of your throat?

- Do you have difficulty swallowing?

- Have you gained or lost weight?

- Do you experience nausea and vomiting?

Acid reflux and GERD are usually diagnosed by the presence of heartburn.

To confirm the diagnosis, physicians often prescribe medications to suppress the stomach's acid production—and if the heartburn then is diminished to a large extent, the diagnosis is considered confirmed. This approach can be problematic

because it does not include diagnostic tests. Therefore, depending on your heartburn's severity, your doctor may order any of the following additional tests and/or procedures:

Endoscopy

Endoscopy is a procedure that passes a light and camera (endoscope) at the end of a flexible tube down your throat to examine the inside of your esophagus and stomach for inflammation, erosion, ulcers and other signs of acid reflux. The doctor may first anesthetize the back of your throat and/or provide a sedative for additional comfort.

A biopsy may also be taken during endoscopy to check samples of tissue under a microscope for infection or abnormalities. Biopsies are usual done to check for Barrett's Esophagus and/or cancer (although cancer resulting from acid reflux is rare).

Barium x-ray

This is a specialized X-ray in which you first drink a syrupy drink containing a harmless radioactive substance called barium. The thick liquid (a.k.a. barium swallow) coats the inside linings of your upper digestive system. You then are X-rayed, and the radioactive liquid lets doctors see a silhouette of the shape and condition of the esophagus, stomach and upper intestine (duodenum). This test is also known as an upper GI series. Because it is a relatively low-tech test that doesn't tell doctors much, it is done less and less nowadays.

pH acid test

This test uses an acid-measuring device to identify when, and for how long, stomach acid backs up into the esophagus. This test is generally considered the most reliable acid-reflux diagnostic test. The acid monitor can be a thin, flexible tube (catheter) that's threaded through your nose into your esophagus.

During the test, the tube stays in place and connects to a small computer that you wear around your waist or with a strap over your shoulder for 24 hours. The probe is then removed.

The acid monitor can also be a clip that's placed in your esophagus during an endoscopy. The probe transmits a signal to a small computer that you wear around your waist for 24 or 48 hours. The probe will fall off on its own and be naturally passed.

Your doctor may (or may not) ask that you stop taking GERD medications to prepare for this test.

Esophagus movement test

This test, a.k.a. esophageal manometry, measures movement and pressure in the esophagus, and also involves threading a catheter through your nose into your esophagus.

Doctors also may order additional tests to rule out other conditions like as heart disease. They may also check for H. pylori, bacteria that can

cause ulcers.

Treatment and prevention

Heartburn

Until you see your doctor, avoid foods that you've found to trigger heartburn and avoid eating at least two hours before bedtime. In many cases, lifestyle changes combined with over-the-counter medications are all you will need to control the symptoms of acid reflux disease, if not eliminate them outright, within a few weeks.

GERD

Because GERD can damage the esophagus and cause serious complications, GERD treatment may require prescription medications and, occasionally, surgery or other procedures.

Over-the-counter medications

Many over-the-counter (OTC) medications are available to relieve acid reflux and/or the pain and discomfort it causes, including:

- Antacids. Antacids that neutralize stomach acid, like Maalox, Mylanta, Gelusil, Riopan, Rolaids and Tums, may provide quick relief. But antacids alone won't heal an inflamed esophagus damaged by stomach acid—and overuse of some antacids can cause side effects like diarrhea or constipation. It's best to use antacids that contain both magnesium hydroxide and aluminum hydroxide. When combined, they may help counteract these gastrointestinal side effects. Antacids are best suited for those with only occasional heartburn

- Acid production reducers. Medications called H-2-receptor blockers reduce the stomach's production of acid, making heartburn or GERD episodes weaker and less frequent. These include cimetidine (Tagamet HB), famotidine (Pepcid AC), nizatidine (Axid AR) or ranitidine (Zantac 25, Zantac 75 and Zantac 150). These powerful medications don't act as quickly as antacids, but they provide longer relief. Stronger versions of these medications are available in prescription form

- Proton pump inhibitors. These popular medications block the stomach's acid production and give damaged esophagus linings time to heal. They are the primary treatment of choice for chronic acid reflux disease. Over-the-counter PPIs include Aciphex, lansoprazole (Prevacid), Nexium, omeprazole (Prilosec OTC) and Protonix. However, awareness of the potential need for dietary calcium should be discussed with your doctor before starting a PPI regimen

- Foaming agents like Gaviscon coat your stomach to prevent acid reflux

- Prokinetics like Reglan and Urecholine can help strengthen the esophageal sphincter, empty your stomach faster, and reduce acid reflux, but have not been shown to be effective when taken without acid reducing agents

Never take two antacids or



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medications together without your doctor's instructions!

Lifestyle and home treatments

You may find acid reflux relief by making small changes. Consider trying to:

- Maintain a healthy weight. Excess pounds put pressure on the abdomen, pushing up the stomach and causing acid to back up. If your weight is healthy, work to maintain it. If you are overweight or obese, work to slowly lose weight—no more than 1 or 2 pounds (0.5 to 1 kilogram) a week. Ask your doctor for help devising a weight-loss strategy that will work for you

- Avoid tight-fitting clothing. Clothes that fit tightly around your waist likewise put pressure the abdomen, forcing acid up and out of the stomach

- Avoid foods and drinks that trigger your heartburn and/or make it worse. Everyone has specific triggers. Common known triggers include alcohol, black pepper, caffeine, carbonated drinks, chocolate, coffee, fatty or fried foods, garlic, ketchup, mint, mustard, nicotine, onion, orange juice, spicy foods, tomato sauce and vinegar

- Eat smaller meals
- Eat high-protein, low-fat meals
- Try sleeping in a chair for daytime naps

- Don't lie down after a meal. Wait at least three hours after eating before lying down or going to bed
- Elevate the head of your bed.

If you regularly experience heartburn at night or while trying to sleep, put gravity to work for you. Place wood or cement blocks under the feet of your bed so that the head end is raised by six to nine inches. If it's not possible to elevate your bed, you can insert a wedge between your mattress and box spring to elevate your body from the waist up. Wedges are available at drugstores and medical supply stores. Raising your head with additional pillows is not effective

- Don't smoke. Smoking decreases the lower esophageal sphincter's ability to function prop-

erly

Surgery

Depending on the outcome of the various procedures mentioned earlier, an acid reflux patient may require a surgical procedure called *fundoplication*. This procedure wraps the upper part of the stomach around the esophageal sphincter to strengthen it and prevent acid reflux. Fundoplication is done only as a last resort. It is also commonly done on babies and children with severe GERD problems.

Alternative medicine

If your acid reflux is worsened by anxiety and stress, consider acupuncture, aromatherapy, gentle exercise like walking or cycling (vigorous exercise can worsen heartburn), herbal remedies, hypnosis, massage, music or relaxation techniques like guided imagery.

Summary

Acid reflux disease is a common condition that strikes an increasing amount of Americans what with the rising number of individuals who are overweight or obese due to unhealthy eating habits. Thus, with corrective healthy eating habits and/or over-the-counter medications, acid reflux can be effectively counteracted—and if further testing and even surgery is required, surgery today is safer and more effective than ever.

So eat well, eat right and take care of yourself and your health—and your acid reflux should take care of itself.

Hamaspik thanks Bennett Roth, M.D., Medical Director of the Centers for Esophageal Disorders and Gastrointestinal Endoscopy, and Chief of Clinical Affairs at the Division of Digestive Diseases, UCLA, for critically reviewing this article—and Susan Perlman, M.D., Clinical Professor of Neurology and Director, Ataxia Center and HD Center of Excellence, UCLA, for referring us to Dr. Roth. ■



Public Health And Policy

Strawberries cause Oregon E. coli

In early August, farm strawberries were linked to an E. coli outbreak in Oregon that claimed one life and caused at least nine other cases of illness.

One-time flu vaccine underway

Work on a one-shot flu vaccine is currently underway in Sweden and Britain using an extremely rare antibody called F16 that kills most strains of the Influenza A flu virus. The vaccine would eliminate the need for yearly flu shots against each annual new strain.

California sets cleaner-water goal

On July 27, California's state EPA issued the nation's first public limit on tap-water levels of chromium 6, a cancer-causing heavy metal. The limit, while not as of yet enforceable, is 0.02 parts per billion (ppb). The national tap-water limit for chromium is 100 ppb.

According to the nonprofit Environmental Working Group, some California cities are home to some of the nation's highest chromium 6 tap-water levels.

California was also the first state to regulate tap-water levels of perchlorate, another contaminant.

Part "D" for decrease

A study of 6,000 Medicare members found that the Part D prescription-drug benefit helped reduce overall healthcare costs for those members by about ten percent, largely because the free or low-cost benefit prevented costlier hospitalizations or other forms of care.

Nuke-attack drug research

As part of its medical countermeasures mission, the little-known Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), a sub-department deep within the HHS, awarded two biomedical firms on Aug. 1 with grants to research two drugs that would combat inflammation of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract caused by a mass nuclear attack or incident.

In related news, the U.S. Defense Dept. has provided \$291 million to develop two potential countermeasures for the Ebola and Marburg viruses, which cause the deadly hemorrhagic fever.

Giffords returns for House vote

Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Ariz.) made a dramatic surprise appearance in Congress on Monday night, August 1, to cast her vote for the historic default-aversion bill. Giffords, who had suffered a catastrophic bullet wound to the head in January, continues to make a miraculous recovery.

New Hampshire best for kids

The annual *Kids Count* report says New Hampshire is the best state for American kids—for the ninth time this decade—thanks to a top combined score of low child-poverty rates and good health, education and economic-security levels.

The Empire State, for its part, ranked 15th best, while Mississippi, which is also the most obese state, is at the bottom of the list, reinforcing the belief that poverty and poor diet habits go hand in hand. ■

Medicare, Medicaid spared in debt deal

Medicare and Medicaid were spared from cuts by Washington's recent last-minute debt-default-prevention deal.

The deal's initial \$900 billion in federal budget cuts will be followed by another \$1.5 trillion in cuts, however. This may affect Medicare with a two-percent trim in future spending. But Medicaid was specifically excluded from the \$1.5 trillion "Round Two" thanks to pro-Medicaid lobbying and state governors' protest of any further Medicaid cuts; federal funding of state Medicaid programs through President Obama's stimulus program ended this July 1.

New Jersey first in new(born) testing

Acting on 2010 federal recommendations, a panel of pediatric and cardiac experts outlined a strategy in late August for routine screening of newborns to improve detection of congenital heart disease. New Jersey will be the first state in the nation to start screening for congenital heart disease (CHD) on August 31 using a noninvasive test, called pulse oximetry.

One percent of all newborns have congenital heart disease, about one quarter of which have critical heart defects requiring early intervention.

Non-federal Alzheimer's committee named

On August 23, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced 12 individuals to serve on the government's Advisory Council on Alzheimer's Research, Care, and Services.

Alzheimer's disease currently affects 5.1 million Americans and is expected to affect more than 20 million by 2050. The National Alzheimer's Project Act, signed by President Obama in January, is intended to help people and families across the country whose lives are touched by Alzheimer's disease with its mission of strengthening Alzheimer's research, and health and long-term care services for affected individuals.

The appointees include David P. Hoffman,

M.Ed., a leading official with at the New York State Department of Health and a public health authority, and Ms. Geraldine Woolfolk, an ordinary citizen and Alzheimer's activist who has extraordinarily cared for her husband for the past 11 years.

Amtrak passengers warned about measles

If you were on Amtrak's Boston-to-Virginia Northeast Regional train #171 on Wednesday, August 17, you may have been exposed to measles, Maryland health officials warn—unless you got off before a single infected passenger got on in Philadelphia.

9/11 disabilities fueling bravest retirements

Health problems linked to the World Trade Center attacks may be spurring an increase in retirements for New York City firefighters, a new study suggests. As a result of the disability retirements related to the attacks, the FDNY pension system is also dealing with increased costs of \$826 million.

The increase in disability-linked retirements in the years after 9/11, which led to the retirement of about ten percent of the FDNY workforce, was mostly due to respiratory-related illnesses, the researchers said.

Legionnaire's triples in decade

Cases of Legionnaire's disease in the United States have tripled in the past decade, a new federal government report shows. However, most victims recover with antibiotic treatment, the CDC says. The number of cases reported rose from 1,110 in 2000 to 3,522 in 2009.

USDA addressing "food deserts"

"Food deserts" are an up-and-coming trend in public health policy, referring to poor urban areas with a dearth of fresh, healthy foods and an overabundance of fast food and other unhealthy junk.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, which even has a U.S. Census-based Food Desert Locator, defines "food desert" as low-income communities with low access to super-

markets or large grocery stores.

The term is part and parcel of a growing movement that melds and emphasizes fruits and vegetables, local eating and eateries and healthy diets, as well as a viable long-term antidote to obesity epidemic. Indeed, the progressive phrase "locavore"—one who eats only locally and/or organically grown food items—epitomizes the trend.

White House orders budget trims

White House budget chief Jacob Lew ordered U.S. federal agency heads in August to submit spending plans for the upcoming budget at least five percent below this year's levels—and to propose ways to trim a total of at least ten percent of their spending. The American Federation of Government Employees, a union of over 625,000 federal workers, decried the call for cuts as job-threatening, however.

Medical electronic privacy danger

The accidentally worldwide electronic accessibility in August of nearly 300,000 California patient medical files—a so-called *data spill*—highlights the risk of digitized health records. These cost-cutting records are an Obama administration goal, but experts say that ever-increasing technology will be increasingly difficult to police and protect.

FDA approvals

August 17: Zelboraf for treatment of late-stage or surgically untreatable melanoma.

August 19: Injectable Adcetris for certain Hodgkin lymphoma patients.

New tick-borne illness

A newly-identified but still unnamed bacterium is currently being spread by deer ticks in the Midwest. The new disease called ehrlichiosis, which causes fever, body aches and fatigue, has been identified in 25 people in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Experts say it will spread nationwide.

Ehrlichiosis is rarely fatal and is usually cured with the same treatment used for Lyme disease (also carried by deer ticks). Prevention consists mainly of avoiding deer tick bites.



So, What's Happening in Your Health Today...?



What's your Eye-Q?

According to recently-released results from the American Optometric Association's 6th annual American Eye-Q national survey, 29 percent of parents feel very concerned that their child may suffer eye damage due to prolonged use of electronic devices. Also, ten percent reported their child experienced headaches, seven percent indicated nausea and six percent reported dizziness after use of 3D technology—and 62 percent estimate their children spend one to four hours using electronic devices each day.

According to the AOA, prolonged use of these technologies can cause computer vision syndrome (CVS): eye strain, headaches, fatigue, burning or tired eyes, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain.

Children can help avoid CVS by practicing the 20-20-20 rule, says the AOA: At least every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and view something 20 feet away.

Miss prints? Here's why

A mutation in a skin gene is the cause of *adermatoglyphia*, a rare condition which causes people to be born without the skin ridges that leave fingerprints, scientists have found.

Possible brain-cancer cause found

Newly-discovered genetic mutations in Chromosomes 1 and 19 may be the cause of *oligodendroglioma*, the second-most common brain cancer, Johns Hopkins scientists say.

Good genes for long life

A comparison of the lifestyle habits of seniors aged 95 to 109 nowadays to when they were in their 70s has found that their earlier-life habits were average—suggesting that genetics, not lifestyle, abet longevity.

More kids hospitalized for mental illness

The rate of psychiatric hospital discharges rose from 1996 to 2007 by more than 80 percent for kids ages five to 13, according to a recent review of the National Hospital Discharge Survey.

McHealthy's?

Not kosher? Absolutely—but in a watershed change, McDonald's is finally confronting, and counteracting, the long-known fact that fast food is bad for kids everywhere. Starting September, its 14,000 national branches will halve their Happy Meal French-fry serving size from 2.4 to 1.1 ounces and include a

fresh fruit or veggie in each. The chain will also reduce sodium by 15 percent across its national menu by 2015.

Common drug ineffective for PTSD

In treating combat veterans with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Risperdal (risperidone) works no better than a placebo, now say VA researchers. In non-PTSD patients, the drug still works for its primary purpose as an antipsychotic, however.

In related news, Risperdal maker Johnson & Johnson reached an agreement in principle to settle a misdemeanor criminal charge of marketing the antipsychotic for unapproved uses.

Exercise strengthens brains

Both aerobic exercise and strength training are key to brain health and good cognition, especially in childhood, says a review of 111 earlier studies—suggesting that physical activity may alter brain structure, trigger growth of new nerve cells and blood vessels and also increase production of certain brain chemicals that promote brain-cell growth and repair.

You've got legs—use them

Sitting at the computer can literally kill: Englishman Chris Staniforth, 20, died of a blood clot after sitting at a console for 12 hours. Such embolisms, formed in leg veins after prolonged sitting, can block lung or heart arteries.

In related news, a new study says that people with low lifetime levels of physical activity are at increased risk for *peripheral artery disease* (PAD), in which narrowed leg arteries reduce blood flow and in turn impair the ability to walk.

And another study reports that people with two or more siblings who've had leg embolisms have a risk at least twice higher of developing the clots themselves.

Bringing in take-out

Calories eaten away from home increased from 23.4 percent to 33.9 percent between 1977 and 2006, says a review of data covering close to 30,000 kids ages two to 18. The review also found that in 2006, not only were kids eating more fast food than ever, but almost half that food was being eaten back at home.

No time for exercise? Try this

A review of 33 exercise studies underscores yet again the benefits of even a little exercise: people who exercise moderately for about 2.5

hours a week—that's just three ten-minute units a day, Monday through Thursday—can reduce heart-disease risk by about 14 percent. And those who do about five hours reduce heart-disease risk by 20 percent.

Bad economy, less surgery

U.S. hospital chain HCA Holdings reported a 1.6 percent decline in surgeries across its facilities in its last quarter compared to the same period last year. According to company executives who talked to the *Wall Street Journal*, one reason may be the economy.

More money, more woes

In 20 locations across 18 nations, researchers with the WHO's World Mental Health Survey Initiative interviewed over 89,000 people to find that high-income countries had higher rates of major depression, and especially high rates (over 30 percent) in the U.S.

Painful childhoods, unhealthy body

Data from ten countries in that same WHO project indicates that kids with adverse childhoods are at increased risk for chronic pain conditions or diseases in adulthood, including osteoarthritis, chronic back or neck pain, frequent/severe headache, heart disease, asthma and diabetes—and the more childhood adversity, the greater the adult health problems.

In related news, kids whose mothers adapted parenting styles to suit their personalities had half the risk of depression and anxiety, a study says.

Less kids' cavities with docs-turned-dentists

A North Carolina Medicaid pilot program reduced early-childhood cavities among young kids by having pediatricians, not dentists, apply fluoride varnish to the kids' teeth. The effect is thought to be caused by the fact that kids see pediatricians far more often than dentists.

Colon cleansing does nothing

The popular and non-FDA-regulated procedure called colon cleansing, a.k.a. colonic irrigation or colonic hydrotherapy, has no health benefit, a review of 20 previous studies now says—but can cause serious side effects ranging from vomiting to kidney failure and death.

"Hey, doctor! Over here!"

Attention, pediatricians: Irish researchers' interviews of 55 children and teens confirm what most

already know: Kids want to be included in doctor-visit discussions and taken seriously.

Some antidepressants may cause falls

Taking or increasing the dosage of so-called *non-SSRI antidepressants* seems to increase falls among nursing-home residents by five times in the two days after the change, a study finds. The researchers call for close monitoring of residents post-change to stop falls. Over one-third of America's nearly 1.6 million nursing-home residents take some type of antidepressant, the study also notes.

Who's got who?

Constantly checking smartphones creates obsessive/compulsive habits, a Finnish study confirms.

Diabetes news

New studies suggest that increasing the proportion of muscle mass in total body weight decreases insulin resistance and pre-diabetes—and that dentists can join modern medicine's ongoing battle to improve early diabetes detection by diagnosing periodontal disease, an early diabetes complication.

Study exposes biased studies

A study of 131 cancer journals, in which researchers present ostensibly objective studies to peers, found that 19 had no disclosure policy for authors' conflicts of interest—and those that did were unclear. Many other studies (and common sense) show that studies are likelier to promote drugs and downplay side effects when researchers have financial stakes in their work.

Serotonin linked to breathing, body heat

An NIH-funded mouse study has linked function of the chemical serotonin with the brain's ability to respond to raised carbon dioxide levels or lowered room temperature—an important finding in sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) research. Researchers theorize that SIDS victims may be unable to react to high levels of carbon dioxide, which may accumulate in a pocket of exhaled breath formed around the face by bedding materials. The ability to regulate body temperature is also thought to play a role in SIDS.

Carcinogenic cows, curative cats, cured chickens

In more bad news for kids growing up on farms, a New Zealand study now finds that blood-cancer

risk for kids growing up near livestock is 22 percent higher—and three higher for those raised on poultry farms. Kids raised on crop farms had regular risk levels.

The study comes on the heels of the December 2010 news curiosity (reported in the *Gazette*) that kids whose mothers lived on farms and around cats are less likely to develop atopic dermatitis, a skin condition, before age two. (Guess farm life isn't that bad after all.)

In related news, lowering antibiotic use on poultry farms actually lowered levels of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in newly-organic chicken flocks, researchers found.

Gout back, poor diet blamed

Researchers have found that gout increased nationwide by 44 percent from 1988 to 2008, linking it to the rise in obesity and hypertension, both fueled by poor diet.

Gout is a form of arthritis that strikes without warning and causes extreme swelling, inflammation and pain in the joints, mostly the feet. It is caused by excess uric acid in the body, which can cluster into crystals inside affected joints and cause intense inflammation and pain.

In related news, new drug Kyrstexxa has been shown to help some of the three percent of very severe gout patients who don't respond to standard treatments, although with some side effects.

Proteus gene found

Scientists at NIH have identified AKT, the faulty gene responsible for the very rare Proteus syndrome, a disorder that causes uncontrolled growth of certain body tissues and organs.

Plasmapheresis saves kidney recipients

An 11-year trial of plasmapheresis, a new anti-rejection technique for kidney transplant patients, left 80 percent of plasmapheresis patients alive eight years after their transplants compared to a maximum of 49.1 percent of non-plasmapheresis patients, Johns Hopkins researchers report.

Plasmapheresis genetically filters kidney recipients' blood to remove molecules called HLA's which interfere with organ donation.

Multivitamins lower complications

A Danish study of almost 36,000 young mothers found that those taking regularly taking multivitamins appeared to have a lower risk of complications. However, U.S. experts currently advise not taking regular vitamins in early motherhood, advising only folic acid. ■

Get Out of Town!

A HamaspiK group-home getaway report

Two HamaspiK of Rockland County Individualized Residential Alternatives (IRAs)—the Forshay and Wannamaker Bridesheims—hit the road the week of August 21-26, enjoying separate short vacations in the glorious summer weather.

The Forshay Bridesheim, directed proficiently by longtime HamaspiK employee Mrs. Sarah Fischer, embarked on its weeklong escape on Sunday the 21st. First stop? Rochester, New York.

Once snugly ensconced in that upstate city—specifically, at a Hampton Inn hotel—the individuals attended regular prayer services at a local Orthodox synagogue, as they are accustomed to doing back home in Monsey.

The next day saw them hit the popular Sea Breeze amusement park, where the *Gazette* got a hold of Mrs. Fischer by cell phone while the Manager was watching several individuals getting off a roller coaster.

Mrs. Fischer put one of the gentlemen on the phone to tell the *Gazette* which rides he liked. Moshe, as it turned out, enjoyed the

Jack Rabbit ride (which turns out to be America's third-oldest operating coaster).

Moshe also had a splash (quite literally) on the Log Flume attraction. "He liked it so much, he went on it twice," said Mrs. Fischer.

Another individual, this one wheelchair-bound, actually rode not one but two disabled-accessible rides—both for the first time in his life.

The day was capped with a sumptuous barbeque cookout at a local park before retiring for the night at the Hampton Inn.

On Tuesday, the group set out for no less a spectacular destination than Niagara Falls. The individuals thrilled to an encounter with the waterfall on the Maid of the Mist tourist boat famous for its up-close-and-personal brushes with the billowing water droplets.

Following their visit to the falls, they spent the night at a Buffalo hotel.

And the following day, the entire party saw the other side of the falls and, more importantly, spent the

bulk of the day at yet another amusement park—both on the Canadian side of the border which they crossed brandishing passports prepared this past winter.

Because securing the critical identification item can take quite some time, Mrs. Fischer began planning the group-home's August activities in January, reflecting the agency's professionalism and organization as a whole—and ensuring that there would be no hitch come summer.

They returned to Rockland County on Thursday morning, having had a blast—and having culmi-

nated highly-anticipated plans over six months in the making.

*

During that same week, the young residents of Wannamaker Bridesheim, under the capable guidance of dynamic leader Joel (Feish) Horowitz, took the Lake George region by storm.

Or, perhaps we should say, the storms took them. But only while driving. Mr. Horowitz proudly points out the providential downpours that came down only while the individuals were being shuttled by van from place to place—but not while they were out and about enjoying them.

That multi-stop hop first stopped at a Homewood Suites hotel in Lake George at 12:00 noon, followed by a refreshing lunch. Once thus "refueled," the group of individuals hit

the area's Fun Stop family recreation center, where they enjoyed several rounds of go-carting.

The rest of the long afternoon was occupied by an outing on Lake George itself, where Mr. Horowitz rented two shady pontoon boats with which the group set out across the water for several hours.

That day was wrapped up at about 10:00 p.m., as the young men, exhausted but happy, returned to their Homewood Suites base for night services, a satisfying dinner and then bedtime.

Following a morning visit to an Albany synagogue early Monday morning, the group then made its way to... Six Flags Great Escape! Spending the entire day at the thrilling amusement park, the individuals rode rides, posed for photos and tried their hands at several games of chance.

By the time they got on the road back home from their two-day getaway, it was 8:00 p.m.—and by 11:00 p.m., they were safely back at 2 Wannamaker Court, where they were shortly in bed after a hearty supper.

So for a two-day whirlwind, it must have taken quite a bit of planning, no? "Nah," jokes Home Manager Horowitz. "It takes two hours to prepare." ■



The Forshay Bridesheim IRA

HamaspiK of Rockland County has taken on Mr. Joel Schnitzer as its newest Medicaid Service Coordinator (MSC). Mr. Schnitzer, an agency veteran, comes to Rockland with over three years of Direct Support Professional (DSP) experience at two HamaspiK residential facilities: HamaspiK of Orange County's Dinev Inzerheim ICF and HamaspiK of Rockland County's Grandview Bridesheim IRA. His experience at both lends him that front-line touch so crucial to effective, compassionate and understanding Service Coordination.

Welcome aboard, Joel! And best of luck.

*

Sweet as candy, purple as a plum, and caught decidedly re-handed: Those are just some of the colorful descriptions evoked by the daily goings-on at HamaspiK of Rockland County's Camp Neshoma program, running now from August 14 to September 5.

Camp Neshoma, the summer version of HamaspiK's After-School Respite Program, is currently in its second session, treating its bunch of happy campers to a daily dose of color-inspired creative activities.

Stimulating and/or educational hands-on crafts marking the program of late include daubing balloons with crimson-tinged finger paints, squeezing juice from fresh oranges, and showing patriotic colors by crafting paper-mache flags in the hues of red, white and blue.

You might even say—at least on the pink-and-blue-themed "Baby Day"—that campers were tickled pink.

*

Happenings around HamaspiK

Yet another session in HamaspiK's ongoing CPR and First Aid trainings for new and existing employees alike was held this Wednesday, August 17 at HamaspiK's administrative offices in Monsey.

*

"It's such an amazing feeling to be important, or to be contributing to society! And that's exactly how we feel at the HamaspiK Day Hab since we were officially assigned our new 'jobs' and 'responsibilities' at the Day Hab center," wrote Direct Support Professional Shimon Kreisel. The DSP's report, in the August 19 in-house newsletter of HamaspiK of Rockland County Men's Day Hab, aptly describes

individuals' sense of self-worth springing from the dignity of work.

But more important than that is the individuals' personal growth.

"What's even more amazing is how our staff encourage us to take upon ourselves jobs and task that might seem impossible for us," continued Mr. Kreisel, "but with their constant support and help they enable us to do things like never before!"

*

Individuals served at HamaspiK are sometimes flying high—and in the middle of August, it turns out, in more ways than one.

With the departure abroad of an individual for a family vacation mid-month, HamaspiK of Rockland

County Day Hab staff decided to turn his absence into a positive experience... by turning ordinary disposable items into a respectable model airplane.

Led by ever-creative DSP Shimon Kreisel, staff and individuals were soon cutting, gluing and decorating Styrofoam cups and plates (and custom-cut pieces thereof) to transform them into veritable miniature flying machines.

Winging it (no pun intended) as they went along, the arts-and-crafts activity was not just an exercise in fine-motor skills and arts-and-crafts, but also in teamwork, communication and improvisation.

"That was the fun part," comments Day Hab Manager Pinchas

Knopfler on the on-the-fly construction of the man-made birds. "Everyone was saying, 'Add this!' or 'Add that!'"

The result? An aerial armada of no less than four planes. "One came out like a masterpiece," proudly notes Mr. Knopfler.

What to call the fleet is the only question remaining. HamaspiK Airlines, anyone?

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HamaspiK of Orange County changed its official name from "Provider-HamaspiK of Orange County" to "HamaspiK of Orange County, Inc."—dropping the word "Provider" for the sake of grammar, clarity and elimination of any confusion.

The change comes on the heels of HamaspiK of Rockland County's equivalent change.

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Attending a popular large area synagogue in Monsey the morning of August 21, your *Gazette* editor happened upon Direct Support Professional (DSP) Mr. Joel Fried, he of HamaspiK of Rockland County's Arcadian Bridesheim IRA, and individual resident Zalman B. The young man was being assisted in donning the tefillin (phylacteries) worn during weekday morning services—and in getting that sense of community inclusion so key to stable and ongoing morale and mental health. The crowd about Zalman and his supportive staffer hardly gave them a glance—meaning that they blended in and didn't stand out.

Which, when it comes to embracing individuals with special needs, is exactly the way it's supposed to be. ■



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