



YOUR LATER YEARS

by HERB WEISS

S E N I O R
I S S U E S

A Prescription for Mending a Broken Heart

Fresh on the heels of the winter celebrations and midnight romance on New Year's, Valentine's Day is another holiday that emphasizes togetherness. Feb. 14 finds restaurants packed with couples and flower shops overflowing with customers, serving as a reminder that's tough to ignore for anyone feeling alone.

But experts say that coping with the "holiday blues" can be as easy as keeping your expectations reasonable this year. Be clear about what is really important to you. If your special occasions don't play out like a Hollywood B movie, that's ok. Family gatherings and holidays like Valentine's Day are not always perfect or reflect a "Kodak" moment.

Does multi-tasking wear you out as you juggle work, cleaning the house and walking the dog? Set aside time for rest and relaxation during the holiday season and all year long.

Don't punish yourself on goals

not met, especially if you had no control of those outcomes. Avoid dwelling on past failures, losses or disappointments. If you find yourself focusing on unpleasant thoughts, refocus yourself to think about positive things and push yourself to pleasurable or relaxing activities such as walking or visiting with supportive family and friends.

Lonely, Depressed... Got the Holiday Blues

If you are hopeless, alone and maybe depressed or suicidal - making it difficult to shake this year's holiday blues - contact The Samaritans of Rhode Island, a nonprofit program dedicated to reducing the occurrence of suicide by reaching out to the despairing and lonely.

Denise Panichas, serving as The Samaritan's interim executive director, notes that the communications-based charity, established in Providence in 1977, teaches volunteers

to effectively listen to people who are in crisis. Conversations are free, confidential and, most importantly, anonymous.

A rigorous training program teaches volunteers to feel and think without expressing personal judgments or opinions. Panichas explains that the listening techniques, referred to as befriending, calls for 90 percent listening and 10 percent talking.

Last year, more than 5,000 Rhode Islanders called The Samaritans, many of whom are daily supported callers who reach out to the agency because family, friends and professionals are not available to listen.

"It doesn't matter what the problem is, be it depression, suicidal thoughts, seeking resources for mental health services in the community or just being lonely and needing to talk," Panichas said.

The Samaritans also offers support to caregivers and to older

Rhode Islanders.

"We do community education programs and also have our peer-to-peer Safe Place Support Group for those left behind by suicide," she said.

The agency's 39-page Web site also has information on suicide prevention and links to more than 60 international, national, state and local resources.

Lastly, the agency wants everyone to know that if it's an emergency and someone is at immediate risk for suicide, then you should call R.I. Emergency 911 directly. But, if you can't seem to shake the holiday blues or just need someone to talk who cares, call The Samaritans' listening line at 401-272-4040. For more information, visit www.samaritan-sri.org.

Herb Weiss is a Pawtucket-based freelance writer who covers aging, health care and medical issues. He can be reached at hweissri@aol.com. ■

New Assistant Medical Director brings personal experience to Blood Center

Dr. Steffini Stalos, 38, of Providence has joined the Rhode Island Blood Center as Assistant Medical Director, aiding in various aspects of administration, but primarily in the areas of donor safety and production management.

A graduate of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine (TCOM), she recently completed a fellowship in Transfusion Medicine and previously had completed her residency in clinical pathology.

She holds a bachelor of science degree from Tulane University in New Orleans and a master's in cellular molecular biology from the University of Texas at Dallas. Dr. Stalos was drawn to medicine from her own battle with an autoimmune condition when she was younger.

"I spent a lot of time in the hospital, but not in the way I would have

liked it to have been," she said. "But that heavily influenced my choice of career. I would be able to help people who are ill."

Dr. Stalos is aware of the challenges facing the blood donation field and in particular is cognizant of situations that may relate to current economic conditions.

"It's hard to say how the economy could impact our donations," she said. "It could go either way. Maybe people want to help their fellow man through donation. On the other hand, there's a lot of moving and upheaval."

She sees expansion of the blood donor pool as important, along with increasing knowledge that will allow some people who had previously been deferred from donating to again become eligible to donate.

