**WMSC Sponsors Two Sessions on Alzheimer's Disease**

Western Mountains Senior College's *To Your Health* program presented two sessions on Alzheimer's Disease. This is a very important topic, as evidenced by the high number of people who attended these sessions.

On October 9, Mark Pechinek from the Maine Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association gave a talk entitled “Know the Ten Signs of Alzheimer's.” He spoke of the following signs which suggest dementia.

1. Memory loss that disrupts daily life: forgetting recently learned information; increasingly needing to rely on memory aids or family members for things formerly handled independently.

2. Challenges in planning or solving problems: changes in ability to develop and follow a plan; keeping track of monthly bills; following a familiar recipe.

3. Difficulty completing familiar tasks at home, at work or at leisure: trouble driving to a familiar location; managing a budget; remembering the rules of a favorite game.

4. Confusion with time or place: losing track of dates, seasons; forgetting where one is or how they got there.

5. Trouble understanding visual images and spatial relationships: difficulty reading, judging distance, determining color or contrast.

6. New problems with words in speaking or writing: difficulty following or joining a conversation; finding the right word; calling things by the wrong name.

7. Misplacing things and losing the ability to retrace steps: putting things in unusual places; losing things and being unable to find them again.

8. Decreased or poor judgment: difficulty dealing with money; decreased attention to grooming.

9. Withdrawal from work or social activities: difficulty remembering how to complete a favorite hobby; avoiding being social because of these changes.

10. Changes in mood and personality: becoming confused, suspicious, fearful or anxious, especially when out of one's comfort zone.

If you notice these signs in yourself or a loved one, see a doctor. The dementia could be due to a number of things, including coronary disease or another life-threatening problem with blood flow. And if it is Alzheimer's, while there is not yet a cure, there are medications which can slow the progression.

The speaker for the follow-up session on November 6, “The Basics of Alzheimer’s Disease,” was William J. Kirkpatrick, Program Director for the Maine Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association. Kirkpatrick stated that at least 5,000,000 people in the United States are at some stage of the disease - early, middle, or late. Explaining that Alzheimer’s Disease is the sixth leading cause of death in our country, he presented a number of facts concerning the disease, with the above being most surprising to many.

Kirkpatrick spoke of the four major risk factors for the disease, the highest being age: 90% of those people with the disease are over 60. Three additional risk factors are health status, environment, and genetics. The focus of future research, he said, will be on drugs and early detection.

Along with detailed information concerning the disease, Kirkpatrick encouraged the audience to learn even more by contacting the Maine Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org/maine). The Alzheimer's Association offers many types of support to the person living with Alzheimer's and to their friends and family. Kirkpatrick alerted the audience to a 24/7 Helpline (800-272-3900), which offers information and referral services, support groups, safety services, advocacy, and education programs. People with Alzheimer’s Disease, care-givers, family, and the general population should pay close attention to helping combat this disease.

These *To Your Health* programs were a collaboration of WMSC, the Bethel Family Health Center, MSAD#44/Continuing Education, and the Alzheimer’s Association, Maine Chapter. All WMSC *To Your Health* programs are free and open to the public.

submitted by Kathleen DeVore and Roberta Taylor