

November, 2007, Program

Coping With Polio's Late Effects

by Dr. Frederick Maynard, M.D. and Sunny Roller

The North Central Florida Post Polio Support Group was treated to a film and discussion session at our November meeting. The film, presented by the University of Michigan Post-Polio Program, included a discussion of how people with post-polio syndrome first experienced polio as a severe viral illness followed by weakness to muscles, ligaments and joints. Although there is basically no cure for post-polio syndrome, Dr. Maynard explained how to preserve muscle strength, joints and ligaments through learning and acquiring excellent health habits including weight control, a healthful diet, control of high blood pressure, not smoking, plus a healthy amount of exercise. It is important to protect our weakened muscles and joints by avoiding falls. There are over 500,000 people coping with post-polio syndrome.

A polio patient, Sunny Roller, introduced several other patients throughout the film who learned to cope with the changes involved in post-polio syndrome. She discussed how people with pps had to introduce their handicap into the family group. She also covered how the changes we endure with post-polio syndrome effect our friends and co-workers and how we have to learn to cope with our limitations, both emotionally and physically. Patients discussed how they lost jobs and friends due to their new limitations and how it affected them emotionally.

We were presented with a philosophy of ACT:

1. Asking questions
2. Communication
3. Transforming lives

We were told how important it is to be optimistic, keep our mind active and get involved in what is most important to us as individuals. We need to be challenged positively and draw on our survival skills. Change happens and you are still you!

After the film, we discussed the article in the latest newsletter entitled "We Never Talked About It." Several of us recounted how difficult it was for us to deal with the changes we faced after having survived polio. Many of us had stories of being forced to compete physically with people who did not have polio, especially by people who didn't understand that we still had limitations and wanted us to "re-build" our muscles. Some of us discussed being placed in hospitals away from their families for six months to a year, and how their possessions, including any photos of them as children were burned along with their toys because of fear that the virus would be transmitted to other members of their family. We also discussed how important is it to accept the help that is offered to us along with the use of assistive devices such as canes, walkers and braces. We should be proud of what we have accomplished, but not so proud that we take unnecessary risks!