

BETTER CHOICES LED TO NEW ROLE

Story by Tara Grindle | Photo by Shelly Willsey

Margaret Valin has had a career in health care, but it was her own health challenges that led to her latest role in helping others stay healthy. Valin is a retired Edmonton nurse who is now a facilitator for the Better Choices, Better Health program, a six-week, self-management workshop for those with chronic disease. “I needed something to do instead of sitting around the house,” says Valin. “This was a way to help others and use my experience.” Better Choices, Better Health is led by community volunteers who themselves have chronic conditions. Valin, 66, is a diabetic who also suffers from chronic pain and arthritis and knows all too well how challenging it can be to manage chronic disease.

“My husband and I attended a similar program for diabetic self-management and the leader said they were looking for volunteers for Better Choices, Better Health, so I decided to sign up.” After learning new techniques and refreshing old ideas, she was inspired to share them with others to help improve their quality of life. Better Choices, Better Health uses peer role modeling to share information about nutrition, physical activity, symptom management, medication management, dealing with difficult emotions and planning for the future.

Valin says a favourite part of the workshop is using guided imagery, a relaxation technique that helps reduce stress and relax muscles. “Using some of these ideas, I’ve been able to reduce my pain meds and get out and exercise more. I’ve even been out gardening this year.” Valin encourages others to think about becoming a Better Choices, Better Health volunteer by registering for the free workshop so they can learn what it’s all about. “The whole process has been enjoyable, especially letting others know there is help out there and they’re not alone.”

For more information on Better Choices, Better Health, or to volunteer to become a leader, contact 780.735.1080 or visit www.albertahealthservices.ca/bcbh.asp

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-Volunteer Margaret Valin, pictured, of leading Better Choices, Better Health workshops

