

## *Help to get well*

By Mike Corrigan, Staff Writer

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NAPLES – Man cannot live by meds alone. Woman, either.

That may explain why the new office of Dona Forke's Wellness Associates, Inc. is located right off an inside room at Naples Professional Pharmacy.

Dona Forke, M.S.R.D.L.D. (a capital way of saying she's a professional dietitian), noted recently that patient self-help is an important part of treatment for long-term conditions and diseases. So she helps patients plan, manage and execute strategies and programs to keep themselves healthy, over the long term.

The best part of such programs can be – the better the program, and the closer it's stuck to, the longer the term.

But people have trouble adhering to diets, or exercising, or avoiding certain foods, or generally doing whatever it is they need to do to, right? And they don't like to be stuck on a regimen and forgotten, that's for sure.

Exactly. That's why, as one certified in child and adolescent weight management, as a professional dietitian and a wellness coach, Forke helps people decide for themselves (with her expert guidance, of course), on a program they can stick to.

"Maybe someone has developed a chronic condition and now wants to lose weight and develop an exercise program. Or maybe the goal is to just get off the meds. A planned, healthier lifestyle, can accomplish those things," Forke said last week.

She added, "We begin by talking. What does the person want to accomplish? What are their goals? We work together to develop a plan that the client believes in. I can provide input and support. But I don't *tell* people what to do. They have to say it first themselves. It's something that we work out together."

Wellness Associates gets referrals from physicians, and already has some of those. Major insurance plans are accepted, and Medicare is accepted for diabetes counseling and follow-ups.

Forke has long been interested in, and involved with, creating a healthier community. She has been involved with Healthy Maine Partnerships, the Bridgton Community Center, the Lake Region Elder Network, OneMaine, and many other community business.

"This business is about creating a healthier community, one person at a time," she said last week, "through chronic disease prevention and management of chronic conditions, as they relate to nutrition therapy, weight management, and enhancement of physical activity."

Forke is president-elect of the Maine Dietetic Association, a steering committee member of the Maine Youth Overweight Collaborative and is on the Maine Diabetes Prevention and Control Committee, and other groups. She holds Bachelors and Masters degrees from Cal State-Long Beach, and has been a Registered Dietitian since 1986. (She also writes a bi-weekly column for *The Bridgton News*.)

The one-hour sessions always start with an assessment. "It's not just what they eat. It's exercise, hobbies, stresses on the job – and what to do about all that. Everybody has a complicated life, and fills a lot of roles. We all need a strategic plan. There are a lot of baby-boomers getting older now – and Maine has an aging population, already. This is about lifestyle choices. Maybe there's not a chronic condition yet, but we would like to maintain what we have. This is all about improving and maintaining your own healthy well-being.