Facilitating a Chronic Illness Small Group

How to begin the conversation in your church or organization

Why do we need a chronic illness ministry?

1. Approximately 1 in 2 people live with one or more chronic illnesses – nearly half of the people you serve.
2. Many with chronic illness are hurting, lonely and exhausted.
3. Many struggle with anxiety, depression, pain and/or significant limitations.
4. Many with chronic illness don’t look sick, so they become an invisible statistic.
5. Chronic illness can be a staggering financial burden. According to the CDC, 86% of all health care spending in 2010 was for people with chronic medical conditions.
6. Chronic illness affects marriage, family, faith, finances, friendships, education, hobbies and work, in short, every aspect of life.

What can your church or organization do?

1. Start the conversation. Begin with one person you know who has chronic illness. Ask them what it’s like. Listen. Try to hear what they might not be saying.
3. Think about possible service projects. How could this ministry offer opportunities for participants to invest in others?
4. Could you offer a Bible study? How often? How long?
5. Think about caregivers. What could you do to help them?

Once you’ve decided to start a ministry:

1. Create a Mission Statement
   Example: To provide a safe, caring, loving environment in which people can grieve, accept and then learn to thrive in the midst of chronic illness.
2. Develop a Vision Statement
   Example: To facilitate participation between those living with chronic illness and [your organization] – an opportunity to specifically serve and minister to those with chronic illness, including them as integral members, and offering them creative opportunities to serve and be involved.
3. **Small Groups**

   - We suggest bi-weekly meetings of 90 minutes or less.
   - Consider the needs of your participants:
     - access to bathrooms
     - space to move around for those who may need it to be comfortable
     - perhaps a few high tables for those who may need to stand
     - wheelchair accessibility
     - time of day and day of week
     - food restrictions if you offer refreshments
     - cost to participants

4. **Group for Caregivers**

   Caregivers also need care. Consider hosting a group specifically for them.

5. **Resources** – What will you need to facilitate this ministry?

   - A place to meet?
   - Printed materials?
   - Curricula?
   - Financial support?
   - The support of a pastor or trained counselor?
   - Email, website, database and/or social media support?
   - Refreshments?

6. **Leaders**

   - Who will lead small groups and for how long?
   - Will you provide training for them?
   - We recommend that people with chronic illness lead the chronic illness small groups and caregivers lead the caregivers groups.

7. **Prayer Request Cards**

   A printable example can be found at the end of this section.
8. **Service Opportunities**

How can those in your chronic illness small groups begin to serve others in your church, organization, community or around the world? Here’s a short list to get you thinking:

- Write cards or letters for those who are hospitalized or homebound
- Write to soldiers or missionaries serving overseas
- Make colorful cards for children’s meal trays at your local children’s hospital
- Read to a child or for the visually impaired
- Knit or crochet prayer shawls, baby blankets or mittens, hats and scarves for those who are grieving, facing surgery or in homeless shelters
- Bake cookies for a youth event, bake sale or for someone who is homebound
- Send birthday cards to nursing home residents
- Make “care kits” with shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, deodorant, healthy snacks, etc. to donate to the homeless or homeless shelters
- Make hospital care bags for those in the hospital or their caregivers – healthy snacks, fruit, homemade cookies or breads, a soft blanket, toothpaste, lotion, a book, puzzle or game, gas gift card, gift card for the hospital cafeteria, etc.
- Create “Birthday in a Bag” kits for local children’s shelters. Include party hats, plates, cups, napkins, forks, a cake mix, frosting, candles, etc.

Be creative. Look for opportunities. Brainstorm ideas. Serving unlocks the door to hope.