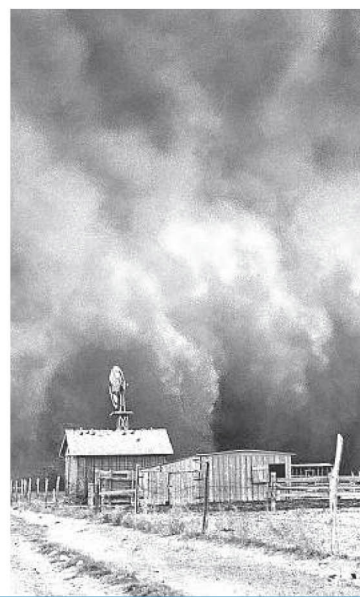




Home | 9F
Stylish range hoods compete for attention (quietly) as people gather in the kitchen.

Arts | 3F
PBS documentary by Ken Burns recounts the horrors of the 1930s Dust Bowl.



Food | 12F
Cinnamon-pecan coffeecake with strawberry-pecan butter will warm up your morning.

Life & Style

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'THEY GAVE ME BACK MY LIFE'

Clinic's success keeps patients out of hospitals, saves millions of dollars

By **Kate Long**
Staff writer

IN 1974, Ellen Cook had a child who could not speak or walk. "We cared for her at home for years," she said. "It was hard, very hard."
"Food can be comfort," she said. She put on serious weight. She weighed 130 when her daughter was born. By age 45, she weighed close to 400 pounds and had developed heart problems, diabetes, thyroid problems, hypertension and gout.

THE SHAPE WE'RE IN



For years after her daughter died, she took care of elderly people and cleaned homes. Her husband was a jack of all trades, a mechanic, a welder, a body shopper. They live "way out" in the Putnam County countryside. "We'd work several jobs at once. Sometimes there was work, sometimes not."

She didn't go to the doctor she said, "till it got bad. You put it off, because you don't want to rack up another bill you can't pay."

"Before I found Health Right nine years ago, I was in and out of hospitals and emergency rooms," Cook said. "I'd be in for congestive heart failure for two weeks, then they'd discharge me with prescriptions I couldn't afford to fill. Within days sometimes, I'd be back in. Then it would happen all over again. It was awful."

One week in the hospital with complex problems can cost more than \$15,000, according to the West Virginia Health Care Authority.

But today, at 58, Cook's life is very different. "I haven't been in a hospital bed even once in nine years, thank the Lord," she said. She has been in an ER only twice in nine years, according to her medical records.

How did she do that?
"I do everything West Virginia Health Right tells me to do, one step at a time," she said with a big smile. "They've given me back my life."

"When I first came to Health Right, I couldn't walk without holding on to the walls," she said. "Within two months, they had me on my feet, moving around, doing what I needed to do."



KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail photos

"Besides medical care, we encourage patients to do things for themselves every day to stay healthy, things that don't cost a lot — walking, taking your blood pressure, cooking healthier meals," says Health Right director Pat White. "It's about medical care plus individual responsibility."



Linda Pipinos' triglyceride levels soared above 1,000 after she lost a good job and benefits. "They called me a walking heart attack," she said during a break from a Health Right exercise class. "Going to Health Right was one of the best things I ever did."

"I haven't been in a hospital bed even once in nine years, thank the Lord. . . . I do everything Health Right tells me to do. And I've learned a lot about taking care of myself."

ELLEN COOK
Health Right patient (below)



CLINIC

FROM PAGE 1F

As Medicaid begins to arrange care management for tens of thousands of West Virginians, Cook can testify to what it can do.

She and her husband and 22,000 other Health Right patients make too much money to qualify for Medicaid and too little to afford care or insurance. "Our patients have part-time jobs or are retired or laid-off," said Health Right director Pat White.

At Health Right, they get free health care and pay \$2 per 90-day prescription.

"Anything they tell me to do, I'll do," Cook said. "I can't afford not to. If they tell me to do a blood lab or X-ray, I do it. They give me my glucose strips, I use them. I can get my medicine now, and I take it."

Just as important, she has learned how to improve her own health. She now tests and monitors her blood sugar and blood pressure levels. She has learned which foods send her blood sugar and blood pressure up.

"Used to be I didn't eat breakfast then mostly ate junk food the rest of the day," Cook said. "Now I eat a good breakfast and small meals after that, real food. Nothing fancy, but I like it."

"Americans think health care means take pills," White said. "We show people how to get off pills."

"I was so scared when I first came to Health Right," Cook said. "A nurse practitioner let me call her at home if my blood sugar went high. She called me sometimes at home too, to see how I was doing. That meant so much to me that she called me."

That kind of personal, face-to-face attention "inspires enormous loyalty," said Nidia Henderson, PEIA wellness director. "It's one reason why they have such success influencing patients to do what they need to do to stay healthy."

Cook has probably saved the health-care system many hundreds of thousands of dollars in nine years by being willing to follow medical directions and change her lifestyle.

"All patients don't comply, but most try," White said.

Only one of CAMC's top 36 ER users was a Health Right patient. "They don't need the ER as much," White said.

CAMC knows Health Right saves them a lot of money. They provide the clinic with a full-time pharmacist, all blood tests and more complex tests such as MRIs. They pay their utilities and provide maintenance and housekeeping. "And we save them millions a year," White said.

'Take charge of your health'

The poor economy brought in many patients who lost solid jobs with insurance, White said. Linda Pipinos, 57, of Char-



CAMC cardiologist Dr. Bill Carter — one of about 150 Health Right medical volunteers — teaches a regular "Healthy Heart" class. "You learn a lot in these classes," said Ellen Cook (right).

KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail photos



Each week, Health Right patients can sign up for healthy lifestyle classes, including "Cooking 101" (clockwise from above), "Country Line Dancing," "Managing Your Diabetes" and "Eating Right When Money's Tight."



leston, is one. She processed claims for Wells Fargo, until one day her gallbladder ruptured. With surgery complications, she was in and out of the hospital for a year. Her employer replaced her.

By 2010, when she came to Health Right, her triglyceride levels (fat in the bloodstream) had risen to 1,316, compared with a normal level of 150. "She was a walking heart attack," said Keith Settle, patient

education coordinator.

She was "staying in the apartment all day, smoking a lot. I was taking my thyroid pill every other day instead of daily, to make it stretch," she said. "I know now that put me at

greater risk of a heart attack."

Finally, late in 2010, someone told her about Health Right. She went. "It was one of the best decisions I ever made."

She lost 57 pounds, brought her triglycerides down to 152

More about West Virginia Health Right

- Health Right offers patient care, pharmaceuticals, dental care, access to a wide range of specialists and self-help education classes. It was one of the first free clinics in the nation to be certified as a health home by the National Committee for Quality Assurance.

- In a 2001 National Institute of Health study, Health Right lowered the overall blood-sugar level (A1C) of participating patients by an average of 24 percent.

- The 644 patients in the Healthy Heart program — funded by AstraZeneca — are now scheduling half as many medical visits per three months, on average, as they did a year ago.

- Twenty-one percent of patients in the Puffer Snuffer program quit entirely after six months in 2011.

- Pharmaceutical companies donated \$31.9 million in medications in bulk last year for Health Right to dispense statewide through the WVRx program.

- Health Right can be reached at 304-343-7000.

and cut her cholesterol almost in half, from 334 to 171.

"My friends say the old Linda is back. I haven't missed one of my grandson's soccer games this year, and I dance with my teenage granddaughter now."

She signed up for Health Right's Healthy Heart program, which offers weekly classes, taught by volunteers. She took the "Puffer Snuffer" class and stopped smoking. After a raw food cooking class, she revamped her cooking.

"They say the more you take charge of your health, the better off you are," she said. "I'm living proof." She has volunteered to teach a cooking class at Health Right this winter. "I'm paying it forward," she said.

'We give back when we can'

So far, Ellen Cook has cut her blood glucose in half with better diet, from above 400 to 205. "Now I need to lose weight to bring it the rest of the way down," she said.

She wants to join Health Right's new Weight Watchers group, but it costs about \$10 in gas to come to town. "We think we can afford it every other week," she said.

"We can never pay them back for what they've done for us," she said. "A few years back, when they were moving, we had some extra dollars, so we hired a U-Haul trailer to help them move. We give back what we can."

She and her husband live quietly in the country. "You step out your door and the air is fresh and the birds are singing," she said. "We don't have much, but I'm thankful each day I can live my life," she said.

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Reach West Virginia Health Right at 304-343-7000.