PFCA Wellness Update

PRINCETON FAMILY CARE ASSOCATES, LLC WINTER 2024

Message from Dr. Fernandez

With our Winter Newsletter, we welcome the New Year and we hope the coming year will be healthy & beneficial for you & yours.

PFCA remains the same but continues to change. One APN (Adria) is slowly diminishing her time as she pursues other psychiatric interests while three others (Adrienne, Raquel and Marisa) continue to expand their knowledge and expertise allowing PFCA to continue true to its course of integrative and complete care. "Not Just Better… Well" as our motto says.

Enjoy the accompanying articles and entertain the following quotes pertinent to all our lives.

"The measure of intelligence is the ability to change." – *Albert Einstein*

"Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them: that only creates sorrow. Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like." – *Lao Tzu*

"Life isn't about waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." – *Vivian Greene*

Dr. Fernandez

Undiagnosed Iron Deficiency

By: Marisa Fernandez, Psychiatric RN

Iron is a vital component of a protein in red blood cells which carry oxygen throughout the body. Iron is also essential for other cellular functions such as energy production, and the maintenance of healthy skin, hair, and nails.

Research from the National Institute of Health suggests that about 1/3 of women of reproductive age in the United States may not get enough iron. Nonpregnant women of reproductive age are at higher risk for iron deficiency compared to men, largely due to menstrual bleeding. Despite the high risks, iron deficiency is not routinely screened for during annual health examinations.

Iron deficiency is often overlooked, due to the lack of specific recommendations for nonpregnant women, as well as the ambiguous nature of its signs, which can include lethargy, irritability, and pale skin. Anxiety and depression can be exacerbated by iron deficiency and we will often screen for it in patients where we have a suspicion it may be an issue. Restless leg syndrome is also worsened by iron deficiency.

Additionally, providers are likely to miss many patients who are iron deficient but not anemic, since anemia requires other testing. Anemia is a medical condition that can be caused by iron deficiency and results in the body having too few healthy red blood cells. In other

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Will I Lose My Memory?

Marisa Fernandez, Psychiatric RN

Cognitive change is normal as we age, but cognitive decline is far from inevitable for most of us, therefore it is important to distinguish normal cognitive changes from the kinds of impairments that may be concerning and may require further evaluation and management. Everyday forgetfulness, such as, forgetting what one is looking for in the fridge or misplacing keys, is a normal biological slowing of processing activity. Needing a little more time and concentration to learn new skills or perform complex memory or organization tasks is perfectly natural in older adults. In fact, most older adults can perform these tasks well if given enough time. Interestingly, while processing speed declines with age, our grasp of meaning and the connections between ideas grows. This is the basis of wisdom as we get older.

Mild cognitive impairment refers to memory difficulties that have a minor impact on our daily lives; for example, losing your keys more often, or needing to concentrate harder to complete a familiar task. Simple tools like key hooks by the door, or daily planners can be used to improve these symptoms over time. It is important to check in with your doctor about your cognition, however, as 1/3 of people with mild

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WILL I LOSE MY MEMORY?

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cognitive impairment will develop dementia within 5 years.

Dementia is a general term for significant impairment in thought, memory, and reasoning, with Alzheimer's disease being the most common form of dementia in adults over the age of 65. While an older adult with mild cognitive impairment may frequently misplace their car keys, a person with dementia might get lost driving home on a very familiar route. Individuals with dementia also begin to show mood changes, become agitated, may begin to wander, and in cases of severe dementia, lose the ability to communicate coherently and require significant assistance with self-care.

AARP has a program available online called "Staying Sharp"; click here to be redirected to their website. It is free for AARP members and at a small cost for non-members. This online assessment allows individuals to compare their cognitive function with others of the same age and similar level of education, and can also help you track changes over time. If you or your clinician are concerned, your clinician might check for conditions that could be causing symptoms that mimic early dementia, such as thyroid disease, vitamin B12 deficiency, depression, and sleep apnea. Early diagnosis can help people understand the changes they're experiencing and possibly begin treatments that might help with symptoms.

Patient Phone Call Policy

While we welcome patients contacting our office if they are experiencing a problem with a medication or have another clinical concern that they feel requires clinical attention, Dr. Fernandez and his staff also want to assure that patients receive adequate care for their concern. Most concerns can be handled in a 5-minute return call by the clinician without further charge to the patient.

However, if the clinician foresees a clinical agenda that would require a phone time of greater than 5 minutes, we will ask that the patient schedule a set appointment to allow the proper time for a full and complete clinical discussion of their clinical concern.

If the patient prefers instead to wait until their next scheduled appointment, we suggest that patients come prepared to that appointment with a list of concerns or clinical matters they would like to discuss.

Also, related to this issue, clinical concerns are best handles by phone to protect patient privacy. We will respond to your emailed concerns, but please know and accept that confidentiality is more vulnerable in email contacts.

Changes to PFCA Telemedicine

In December of 2024, our telemedicine patient appointment platform made some changes to the product our office has been using since March of 2020. These changes made it inoperable for our reception staff to check-in patients prior to their appointment or check-out after. Understandably, this has been disruptive to the process we have all become accustomed to.

We have now integrated a clinic version of the Doxy.me telemedicine platform starting in January of 2025. Be mindful that as we make this change there will be a new URL link for each clinician. Look for this new hyper link in your future email appointment reminders and **do not use** the old link in prior appointment emails.

We will continue to update patients on any additional changes to our telemedicine procedures once fully implemented. Patients are always welcome to come in-person for their appointments and are required to come in at least once annually.

Evolving Clinical Roles at PFCA

Adria Trapani-Barnacz has been a clinician at Princeton Family Care Associates (PFCA) since September of 2017 when she was first licensed as a New Jersey Registered Nurse. Since 2017, she has worked both as a registered nurse and later as a nurse practitioner under Dr. Fernandez's tutelage. Presently, Ms. Trapani-Barnacz has decided to transition her professional focus from clinical to research. As such, we regretfully announce that starting January 2025 her availability at PFCA will be limited to Mondays only. This schedule will be effective until the end of July. It is not clear what her clinical role at PFCA will be after that time as she has not advised us of her future plans. Patients are encouraged to discuss this matter with her during their remaining visits.

Raquel Rahim, APN, Adrienne Elmer, APN and Marisa Fernandez, RN, under Dr. Fernandez's direct supervision, will continue to handle ongoing clinical care for PFCA patients.

IRON DEFICIENCY

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words, anemia is the final manifestation of untreated iron deficiency.

In 2023, in recognition of the burden on iron deficiency on quality of life, the International Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology recommended all menstruating women and girls should be screened for iron deficiency, ideally, throughout their lives. Once properly diagnosed, iron deficiency is easily treatable with iron supplements. Speak with your clinician if you are concerned that you may be experiencing signs of iron deficiency.

NEED A MEDICATION REFILLED?

Contact the office **before 3:00pm** on regular business days. Requests after 3:00pm will be ordered the next business day. Requests are NOT available on WEEKENDS. Thank you for being mindful of your medication supply!