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From the Chairs: New Leadership at Eastern Mass OWL



At our January 18th chapter meeting, Eastern Mass OWL kicked off the new year by electing new officers and by starting to plan some new activities for 2007, including a spring forum on caregiving.

Former chapter President Ellen A. Bruce has stepped down to devote her energies to leadership of National OWL.

Newly elected Co-Chairs are Elizabeth Johns and Kim Johnson. Lynn Girton kindly agreed to continue as chapter Treasurer, and Judith Conahan and Rachel Puopolo will share responsibilities as chapter Secretary. Judith will continue to edit and produce this newsletter, while Rachel will keep track of meeting notes and tackle the important task of reviving the chapter website. The position of chapter Vice-Chair remains vacant, and expressions of interest are invited. Accepting an officer's position is a terrific way for a member to help build the chapter while continuing to develop leadership skills. If you are interested in exploring that opportunity, you are encouraged to contact us.

Preliminary planning has begun for Eastern Mass OWL's annual spring forum. The focus this year will be on women and caregiving. Possible issues to be covered include the challenges families experience in caring for elders and the needs of formal and informal care providers. Do you have experience or concerns about these critical issues? Members interested in helping to plan and organize this event are very welcome to join us. Our next meeting is Thursday, February 8, at noon (Wheatley Hall 3- 98, on the UMass Boston campus). You are also invited to a "pre-meeting," starting at 11:30, with OWL members and Becca Gutman, representing SEIU division 1199, the health-care workers' union. The meeting will discuss how OWL can support 1199's current "Unite for Quality Care" campaign (see Calendar).

January marks the start of a new year, and it is also the time when most chapter membership renewals come due. By now, you probably have received a renewal packet from Ellen Bruce and Edris Kelly, representing the membership committee. If you haven't done so already, please return your renewal form and dues as soon as you can. Your continuing support is very important to us!

Also, if you know of someone who might be interested in OWL, we will be pleased to send them an informational packet and an invitation to join. As always, we encourage members to stay involved and stay in touch. Please contact us with your ideas, comments, and questions at: massowl@msn.com. We'll enjoy hearing from you.

in this issue

- **From the Chairs: New Leadership at Eastern Mass OWL**
- **Book Event: Menopause and Beyond**
- **Legislative Update**
- **Elder Economic Security Standard**
- **Calendar**

Book Event: Menopause and Beyond

On December 5, 2006 Eastern Mass OWL celebrated the recent publication of [Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause](#) with a speaking event at University of Massachusetts Boston. As a founder of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, a contributor to all editions of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause*, and an Eastern Mass OWL member, I was delighted to talk and lead a discussion on "Menopause and Beyond: The Myths and Realities of Midlife Women."

It's important to put the book in historical context. The current large and aging generation of Baby Boomers (now 42-60 and in midlife) has the potential to live more fully and healthfully than generations before it. Likewise, the current cohort of midlife women who have been through, are going through, or will be going through menopause (numbering at least 33 million) have the opportunity to redefine attitudes toward and raise consciousness about women during menopause, midlife and into old age.

As we each navigate this midlife transition we certainly want the best, most current information, resources and support needed to be informed consumers, take care of ourselves and empower ourselves. The book provides this information and addresses the cultural, social, economic and political forces that can undermine our confidence, health and well being as we navigate this experience. Three cultural attitudes that influence our thinking about menopause are medicalization, ageism, and sexism:

- **Medicalization** - Viewing menopause as a medical event, a hormone deficiency disease or ovarian failure, that needs life long treatment rather than as a natural change as our body gets used to new hormonal levels
- **Ageism** - A pervasive cultural attitude that idealizes the young and has a negative, discriminatory attitude toward people over 50, and that commercial interests (especially the pharmaceutical, cosmetic and fashion industries) exploit and profit from, playing on our fears of aging.
- **Sexism** - Our society's attitude that still values women for our youth, beauty, and reproductive and sexual capacity and desexualizes and devalues aging women more than men. In our youth-obsessed culture, it is hard to accept the natural changes of our aging bodies.

Why do we live in a society that clings to the ideal of remaining forever young rather than aging well with courage, passion and power? We need to keep a critical perspective on this and resist these attitudes.

Together we must seize the decade. We have demographics on our side and the clout to be proactive, reframe issues, deconstruct ageist attitudes, and advocate for policies and programs that empower and improve the health, well-being, and status of women during menopause and beyond.

Joan Ditzion

Legislative Update

The Legislative Caucus on Older Citizens' Concerns met on Thursday, January 25, 2007, in the House Members' Lounge at the State House. Caucus Co- Chair Rep. Barbara A. L'Italien, with 47 legislators and members in attendance, presided as legislators described their bills. Many were discussed and all will be presented on a ballot sent to all members in order to vote on the Legislative Caucus's five or six

priorities to be sponsored for this session. The outcome of this vote will be announced at the next Caucus Meeting in February. Bills of particular interest to Eastern Mass OWL presented at the caucus include:

Sen. Patricia Jehlen: The Paid Sick Days Bill, for workers without sick leave; The Tax Deferral Bill, which would increase tax deferrals for those over 60 years old in cities and towns; and The Fair Collection Practices Bill, an act to protect seniors from harassing calls from debt collectors.

Rep. Ruth Balseer: An Act to Provide Equitable Coverage in Annuity Policies, making them gender neutral; and An Act to Create an Exemption for Low-Income Seniors from Proposition Two and One-Half Overrides

Rep. Michael Festa: The Equal Choice Bill, passed in the last legislative session, still needs to be adequately funded and line items amended to make it possible for home care to be implemented. There is also a need to create a protocol for pre- screening.

The Paid Sick Leave bill, which OWL fully endorses, has been filed again. It is a critical piece of legislation since almost half of all workers in the private sector in Massachusetts do not get a single paid sick day. This bill, House Docket Number 733 (Kay Khan lead sponsor) and Senate Docket number 926 (Pat Jehlen and Steve Tolman, co-lead sponsors) will provide all employees seven sick days per year. The bill will be assigned to a committee and there will be a hearing in the spring. Between now and then, the Paid Sick Leave Coalition is seeking stories and more Reps and Senators to sponsor the bill.

The Coalition welcomes any names/stories for press feeds and interviews, as well as for talking up this issue at the State House. Please send stories with names and contact info to Ingrid Nava: inava@gbls.org or 617-603-1684. If a person is uncomfortable being identified, names will be kept anonymous.

At last count there were 47 House signers and 8 Senators. Please contact your Representative or Senator on this bill. If they have signed, thank them. If your Senator has not, please encourage him or her to co-sponsor the Senate bill, which does not have a deadline for accepting co-sponsors. For a copy of the bill and /or a list of those Representatives and Senators who have signed on, contact Ingrid Nava as well.

The Lifespan Respite Act, signed into [Public Law No: 109-442](#) in December 2006, authorizes \$289 million over 5 years for grants or cooperative agreements to develop state and local lifespan respite programs, planned or emergency respite care services, training and recruitment of respite care workers and volunteers, and care giver training. Lifespan respite programs are defined as "coordinated systems of accessible, community-based respite care services for family caregivers of children and adults with special needs."

Elder Economic Security Standard

The Elder Economic Security Standard, a tool developed by Laura Russell and Ellen Bruce, to measure how much income elders need to live modestly in Boston and Massachusetts, is now available. "On the Edge: Facing a Challenging and Uncertain Future, The Elder Economic Security Standard for the Boston Area" was released by the Boston Foundation on December 12, 2006. The next day, the "Elder Economic Security Standard for Massachusetts" was released in Worcester by the UMass Boston Gerontology Institute, Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW), and the Massachusetts Association of Older Adults (MAOA). Both reports are available at <http://www.geront.umb.edu/eess>. In addition, media coverage for the release is posted on the website. MAOA is convening an advisory group for development and implementation of an action agenda.

February 8, 2007 – Eastern Mass OWL chapter meeting, 12:00-1:00 p.m., Wheatley Hall 3- 98, University of Massachusetts Boston. A pre-meeting starting at 11:30 will feature SEIU 1199 rep Becca Gutman discussing her union's "Unite for Quality Care" campaign (see below).

February 10, 2007 - "Unite for Quality Care" 1199 SEIU Rally, 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. at UMass Boston Ballroom, focusing on affordable, accessible healthcare, good jobs for healthcare workers, advocacy for the PCA program, and support for more community-based options for seniors. Info: 877-409-1199.

March 24, 2007 - Greater Boston OWL, presentation and discussion of quality care campaign and caregiver issues by SEIU 1199 rep Becca Gutman at the Brookline Senior Center from 1:30 to 3:30.

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