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By ROBERT PIERCE • Leader & Times The Centers for Disease Control reports seven out of 10 deaths among Americans each year are from chronic diseases, with heart disease, cancer and strokes accounting for more than 50 percent of all deaths each year.

In 2005, 133 million Americans – almost one out of every two adults – had at least one chronic illness.

Now, a program developed at Stanford University and available locally is helping people manage their health and control chronic disease symptoms.

Seward County K-State Research and Extension is looking for participants for the third year of its chronic disease self-management program called the Kansans Optimizing Health Program.

The six-class course was scheduled to begin today, but Extension agent Kathy Bloom said due to lack of interest, this year's program will be moved to the spring of 2013. The sessions are led by two trained leaders. Research studies have shown KOHP is effective in helping people manage their health and control chronic disease symptoms, and the class is of particular interest to those with ongoing health concerns such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, fibromyalgia, heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease, obesity and stroke.

Bloom said the program has been quite effective in Liberal.

"The participants have really felt like they have benefited from the class," she said. "One of the skills that's taught in the class is goal setting. It goes into detail. You do specific goal setting each week. You report the next week about how you'd done."

In KOHP, participants will learn how to:

- Deal with problems such as frustration, fatigue, pain and isolation;
- Maintain and improve strength, flexibility and endurance through exercise;
- Use medications appropriately;
- Communicate effectively with family, friends and health professionals;

- Include a healthy diet as part of the day; and
- Work in partnership with health-care teams.

Bloom said goal setting is one of the biggest benefits of the class.

“Just learning specific goal setting and not being overwhelmed by different tasks,” she said. “It just gives you all kinds of different skills on how to handle any kind of chronic condition and just life in general.”

Participants can miss sessions, but because activities from each session, attending all of the sessions is suggested to get the most out of the program.

“We try to hold it once a year,” she said. “Usually, it’s in the fall. We’ve done it in the morning and in the afternoon.”

To register from KOHP, call the Extension office at 624-5604. Class size is limited to 12 participants, so register early, and people must pre-enroll to attend.

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