

Seniors and boomers learn about health and finance at Life Expo



OUR PICKS



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Daniel Stein of Neurology of Cannabis in Sarasota breaks down the benefits of medical marijuana during the first Life Expo on Saturday at Roberts Arena. [Herald-Tribune staff photo / Anna Bryson]

People 65 and older are the largest demographic in Sarasota County, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Sarasota seniors and baby boomers gathered for the first Life Expo on Saturday at Roberts Arena to learn about health issues, assisted living and financial planning.

“This is the first time we’ve had something like this for older folks in Sarasota,” said Barbara Donner, 76. “I’m glad we have this now.”

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Allure Medical offered free vein screenings and mappings for varicose veins to about 40 people who lined up at a booth.

“It’s good for awareness,” said Erica Lubonski, a registered vascular technologist. “It’s better when you can show people what’s going on with them instead of just talking about it.”

Several medical doctors were at the Life Expo, giving presentations and answering questions.

“It’s great we actually got to talk to medical doctors,” said Beverly Meadows, 80, who lives in Osprey. “It’s hard to find the chance to talk to doctors about things.”

Among the medical professionals was Daniel Stein, a doctor at Neurology of Cannabis in Sarasota, who gave a presentation of the benefits of medical marijuana for seniors.

“Relaxation is a very important process especially in our industrialized society,” he said. “Sometimes people need help relaxing ... If you don’t relax, you’re not healthy.”

He explained marijuana’s benefits for anxiety, eating and sleeping.

People had questions about using cannabis to treat glaucoma and Parkinson's disease; if it increases heart rate; and if it's covered by insurance.

Stein emphasized that cannabis therapy can be used in a way that does not make you high.

Ursula Rykert, 80, a snowbird from Michigan, said she was glad she had the opportunity to learn more about medical marijuana, although she is still skeptical.

Stein's practice recommends marijuana treatments and helps in the process of qualifying for a medical marijuana card. His practice works with Columbia Care, which sells cannabis.

Although the state Office of Medical Marijuana Use doesn't provide an age breakdown of the more than 150,000 Floridians who are certified to buy medical marijuana, Wayne Sluman, the general manager of Columbia Care in Sarasota, said that the majority of his customers are 55 and older.

"The growth in the state of Florida has been phenomenal," Sluman said. "It's a booming marketplace."

In addition to seniors, Sluman said another large group he serves is veterans.

Many veterans who attended the Life Expo also got the chance to learn about veterans benefits. Jami Worley, an attorney at Worley Elder Law, explained how to prepare a strong claim.

She emphasized the importance of using personal statements and "buddy statements" (supporting statements from loved ones) when filing claims.

Another health aspect on display was an exhibit of electric bikes that have small engines that can help with pedaling when the cyclist needs it.

"A lot of people have hip replacements or knee replacements, and maybe they haven't been able to cycle," said Leslie Tilton, owner of E-Bikes and Cycles. "This helps you get back to cycling. It's really great for older people who want to be healthy."

Among other offerings were guidance on navigating insurance, with help from Jack Hatfield at Priority Insurance who answered questions about leaving a group plan, restrictions on plans and all the nuances of Medicare.

The Senior Friendship Center, a nonprofit that's worked in the area since 1973, hosted games of bingo. At their two centers in Sarasota and Venice, the nonprofit offers bingo, bridge, canasta and pinochle.

"We connect older adults with younger adults, it's really a poetic conversation," said Robert Rogers, director of community outreach for the organization.