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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**SWFAS LAUNCHES
NEW PROGRAM FOR SENIORS**

Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS) has launched a new program to help identify senior citizens needing substance abuse treatment and assist them in accessing treatment.

The new program, called BRITE (Brief Intervention and Treatment for Elders), is funded with a three-year \$450,000 grant from the Florida Department of Children & Families.

SWFAS counselors will work with hospital emergency rooms, primary care physicians, and civic groups to heighten awareness of the signs and symptoms of substance abuse and misuse among the elderly. (*See attached Signs & Symptoms.*) Residents who are identified as potentially having a substance abuse disorder then will be screened and, if necessary, referred for treatment.

As many as 17 percent of adults older than age 60 are affected by alcohol abuse and prescription drug misuse, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Alcohol has been identified as the most common form of substance misuse among the elderly.

“We have a very large population of people over the age of 60 in Southwest Florida and most of them move here from somewhere else. They often arrived unattached to the local community and may use alcohol as the social lubricant to assimilate into the community,” said SWFAS Prevention Director Sheree Beau-Wells.

According to a recent national study, 98 percent of the \$10 billion spent on hospital admissions for older adults with alcohol and medication addiction are expenditures for the

consequences of the disease, such as hip fractures, liver and kidney disease, depression, gastrointestinal problems, dementia and other health problems.

“Less than two percent is actually spent on the primary illness of substance use disorder. Since many of the symptoms of substance use disorder mimic other illnesses, they may be overlooked, making it less likely that an older adult will received proper treatment,” Beau-Wells said.

SWFAS officials recommend that every person 60 years old and older be screened for alcohol and prescription drug abuse as part of his or her annual physical examination. (See attached sample screening questions.)

BRITE services will be available in hospitals and other social service locations in Lee County.

“We’re still in the process of determining the best locations, dates, and times for BRITE services,” Beau-Wells said.

SWFAS is Southwest Florida’s most comprehensive substance abuse treatment and prevention program, operating from nine offices throughout Lee and Hendry counties. Since 1980, SWFAS has helped more than 63,000 residents in Lee, Charlotte, Glades and Hendry counties rebuild their lives. SWFAS offers treatment services at all levels of intensity including residential, outpatient counseling, and group therapy. In addition, SWFAS provides detoxification services for adults, prevention programming for all ages, and an Employee Assistance Program for about 60 Southwest Florida businesses. SWFAS is a United Way agency.

For more information about the BRITE program, call Beau-Wells at 332-6937, Ext. 127, or visit the SWFAS web site at www.swfas.org.

Also Provided:

Sample Screening Questions (below)

Symptoms and Signs of Substance Abuse (attached)

BRITE Program
Sample Screening Questions

1. On average, how many days a week do you drink alcohol?
2. On a typical day when you drink, how many drinks do you have?
3. Do you smoke cigarettes or use other tobacco products?
4. Do you use prescription medications for any reason other than prescribed by your doctor, or find that you are having problems with your medications, such as taking more pills than prescribed by your doctor?
5. Do you often feel depressed, helpless, or dissatisfied with life?

Source: Southwest Florida Addiction Services (SWFAS)