There is snow on the ground as I write this. The beginning of winter brings thoughts of winter sports and recreation as well as the dread of cars skidding, cold nights and snow shoveling. I personally do not care for winter, but my daughter, a Canadian hockey player, loves it. The most important thing is that we stay safe in the winter. In this issue of the Latterman Letter are some good tips for winter safety as well as specific ideas for the elderly to avoid making a trip to the emergency room for a cold related problem. We all must use common sense, but by paying attention to the tips provided here, we should be able to have a safer winter.

There is also a good article on mammograms by Dr. Weerasinghe, the editor of the letter. We recommend mammograms for every woman over 40 and sometimes for those younger than 40. This article should help you understand this common procedure better. Ask your doctor if you should have a mammogram. Vouchers are available to help pay for this procedure and no one should miss having it because of lack of funds or insurance. This will probably be Dr. Weerasinghe’s last issue as editor after doing this for 2 years. We appreciate her efforts.

Have a wonderful, safe and healthy holiday

William H. Markle, M.D.

Dr. Daphne Bicket has strong ties to McKeesport. She was employed as the medical librarian in 1975. Many of the residents and staff that she assisted are practicing today. Wanting to do more than manage medical information, she graduated from Bowman Gray School of Medicine in North Carolina in 1983. Her Family Medicine training was at NC Baptist Hospital. Upon graduation, Dr. Bicket joined a Rural Health Clinic in Wilkes County, NC where she worked for 6 years. While she speaks fondly of her years in NC, “home” is Pittsburgh. She returned to work in the Family Medicine Residency in 1996.

Care of vulnerable populations is a priority, so Geriatrics, the 9th Street Clinic and the Prescription Voucher Program are special interests. Dr. Bicket considers the residents her teachers, “They challenge me every day! I try to model a compassionate approach to patients. My Mantra: Treat your patients as if they were your own family.” A bumper sticker tucked in a corner of her bulletin board, My Boss is a Jewish Carpenter, is a reminder of what centers Dr. Bicket’s life. “It is by and through God’s grace that I have the privilege to be a physician, and am entrusted with the care of patients and the mentoring of future physicians. My daily prayer is that I harm no life but build life.”

Dr. Bicket lives in Pittsburgh with her husband, John. They enjoy gardening, the symphony and Pitt sports. She does not plan on retirement and hopes to practice medicine as long as she is able. She and John have been working the family farm in Ruffsdale in Westmoreland County. “I love to cook and there is nothing to compare with vegetables right out of the garden. It is a good way to stay active into old age.”

How many observe Christ’s birthday! How few, His precepts! O’ tis easier to keep holidays than commandments.

Benjamin Franklin
Resident Physician Spotlight

**Dr. Morcos Habib** was born in Cairo, Egypt, one of the busiest cities in the world. “My parents taught me that the short cut to a good life is by serving others. Since childhood I dreamt of being a doctor. This was the job where I could work with the most weak and vulnerable in society. I graduated from medical school and shortly after that fell in love with my colleague, Sally. We were married. Soon we came to the USA so I could pursue further medical training in Family Medicine here at McKeesport. God gave us a precious gift, Tiffany, my sweet daughter. Here I am now, thousands of miles from home with a small family, still looking for my childhood dream of being a good doctor who can be of service to others.”

**Dr. Khin Thein** was born and raised in Myanmar (previously known as Burma), in Southeast Asia. She attended medical school at the Institute of Medicine I in Yangon. After graduation she pursued the Master of Science degree in Health Education at Western Illinois University and graduated in 2004. She also served as a graduate assistant coordinator during that time. She started her residency in Family Medicine in McKeesport in 2005. She is happily married to Dr. Kyaw Zaw, a second year resident at McKeesport and she is starting to plan a family. Her well known signature is her smile. “I love working with patients and I am always up for new challenges.” Currently she is serving as co-chief resident.

Winter Safety for the Elderly

Extremes of weather are particularly challenging at the extremes of life. According to the Red Cross, 50% of cold related injuries occur in people over 60 years old and 75% of those are in men! Some suggestions for preparing for winter:

- Make sure you get your flu shot, it is not too late.
- Practice good hand washing to avoid spreading infection.
- Stay well hydrated; it is easy to get dehydrated in the winter due to the drying effects of indoor heat. Hydrate with non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic beverages and use a humidifier.
- Be careful when using fireplaces, stoves or space heaters. Make sure they are at least 3 feet away from anything that might catch fire. Invest in a carbon monoxide detector. Everyone should have a smoke detector. Make sure it has good batteries and works properly.
- Just in case, keep emergency supplies handy: a flashlight, radio, extra batteries and water.
- Wear layered clothing outdoors. Avoid slippery or unshoveled surfaces and don’t take chances. If you must be out, wear boots or non-skid shoes. Wear a cap.
- Use common sense if you must shovel snow. If in doubt, check with your doctor.
- Be aware of the risk of depression or seasonal affective disorder (SAD) during the winter months.
- Check on elderly friends and neighbors often, especially when it is too cold to go out. Offer to get their groceries and medications. Bring them something special like a plant, book or DVD. The greatest gift you can give anyone, however, is time and companionship.
Adverse health effects from cold weather are not exclusive to the north and cold harsh weather can affect you whether you are inside or outside your home. The following are some health tips for this time of year:

**Dress warmly and stay dry.** Adults and children should wear a hat, a scarf or knit mask to cover the face and mouth, sleeves that are snug at the wrists, mittens (they are warmer than gloves), a water-resistant coat and shoes, and several layers of loose-fitting clothing. Be sure the outer layer of clothing is tightly woven, preferably wind resistant, to reduce loss of body heat from the wind. Wool, silk or polypropylene inner layers will hold more body heat than cotton. Stay dry as wet clothing chills the body rapidly. Excess perspiration also increases heat loss, so remove extra layers of clothing if you feel too warm. Avoid getting gasoline or alcohol on your skin while de-icing and fueling your car or using a snow blower. These materials in contact with the skin greatly increase heat loss from the body. Do not ignore shivering. It is a sign you are losing heat and a signal to return indoors.

**Avoid exertion.** Cold weather puts an extra strain on the heart. If you have heart disease or high blood pressure, ask for your doctor’s advice regarding shoveling snow or doing hard work in the cold. If you have to do outdoor chores, dress warmly and work slowly. Your body is already working hard to stay warm. Many hazards of snow shoveling can be minimized or eliminated by these recommendations:

1. Allow enough time to do the work and take breaks every 10-15 minutes. Don’t shovel too quickly.
2. Avoid eating a large meal before shoveling. When you stop to rest, drink water.
3. Use a long handled shovel and keep your back straight and knees bent to avoid back injuries. Always throw snow forward.
4. Wear shoes with rubber soles to prevent falls.
5. Avoid throwing snow over your shoulders. Avoid lifting it if possible. Try pushing the shovel to move snow off sidewalks and driveways.
6. Remove snow as soon as it stops falling or tackle heavy snow in two stages. First skim the snow off the top then remove the bottom layer. Do not overload the shovel.

**Understand wind chill.** As the speed of the wind increases, it will carry heat away from your body much faster. If there are high winds, serious weather related health problems are more likely, even when temperatures are only cool. See [http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill](http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/windchill) for a wind chill chart that shows the difference between air temperature and perceived temperature, the amount of time until frostbite occurs, a wind chill calculator and information on the updated wind chill temperature index.

**Be Safe during recreation.** If you are hiking, camping or skiing during cold weather, do not become over tired. Take emergency shelter and carry waterproof matches and paraffin fire starters with you. Carefully watch for signs of cold-weather health problems.

Every year people are treated in the hospital emergency department for injuries associated with sleds, toboggans and snow disks. The most common hazards are collision with a moving car or a stationary object like a stone, a pole, a building or a tree.

*Safety tip—never ride head-first on a sled or toboggan and do not lie down on a snow disk.*

Make sure children wear helmets while sledding, skiing and skate boarding. It is a good idea for adults too. Always have an adult supervise these activities, especially for young children, and make sure the play area and slopes are free of hazards.

Adapted from the Pennsylvania Department of Health Website
PROTECT YOURSELF

Get a Mammogram

**What is a mammogram?** A mammogram is a safe X-ray picture of the breast. A mammogram can find breast cancer even before a woman can feel it. A mammogram is the best way to discover breast cancer early and get effective treatment. Prevention and early treatment of breast cancer will prevent pain and suffering for you and your family.

**Who needs a mammogram?** A woman’s risk of breast cancer increases with age. Women over age 40 are advised to have a mammogram every 1-2 years.

**What happens during a mammogram?** Each breast is gently compressed between two plates and an X-ray image is made. Compression evens out the breast thickness so that all tissue can be seen and small abnormalities won’t be obscured.

**Tips to prepare for your mammogram.**

- Schedule your mammogram at a time when your breasts are least sensitive, typically the week after your period.
- If you are concerned about discomfort, take an over the counter pain reliever about one hour before your test.
- Wear a two-piece outfit, so that you only need to take the top off.
- On the day of the mammogram do not use deodorant, powder or lotion under your arms. These substances may show up on X-ray and interfere with your mammogram results.
- Before scheduling your mammogram, tell your doctor about any problems or concerns with your breasts. Also tell your doctor about any prior surgery, hormone use and family or personal history of breast cancer.
- Always tell your doctor and the technician if there is any possibility you might be pregnant.
- Tell the technician if you have breast implants.
- If you are going to a new facility for your mammogram, gather any prior mammograms and bring them with you to your appointment so the radiologist can compare them with your new images. It is important to bring the original mammogram films, not copies, and accompanying reports.

D. T. Weerasinghe, M. D.