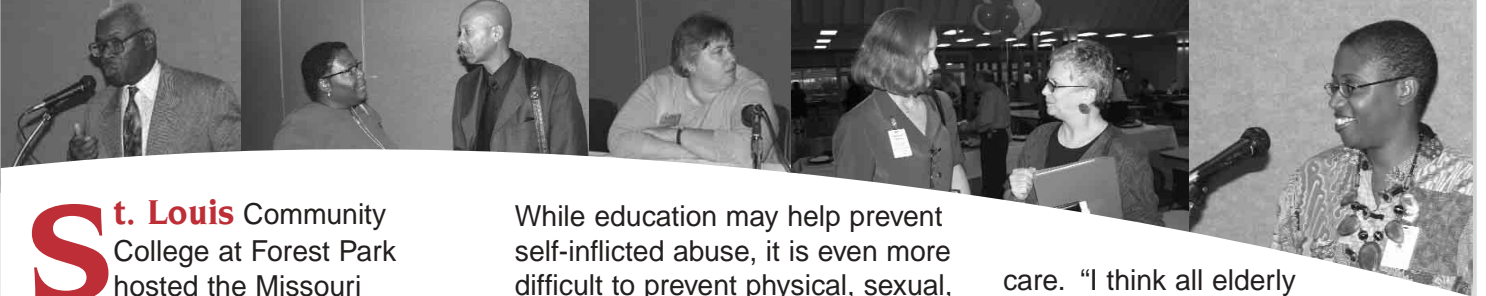


Forum Focus

St. Louis, Missouri



St. Louis Community College at Forest Park hosted the Missouri Foundation for Health's final 2003 forum on Sept. 16. With 80 attendees, the St. Louis forum presented a good overview of the state's health care challenges, highlighting many familiar issues but also adding some new ones.

In St. Louis, speakers mentioned several groups who need mental health and/or substance abuse assistance, including patients with HIV, people with bipolar disorder and recovering alcohol and drug abusers. Presenters suggested counseling, increased insurance and federal coverage, long-term care facilities and prevention programs as necessary solutions.

Substance abuse is one area in which prevention can make an impact, said Maggie Fowler, National Council on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse, St. Louis Area. Citing that in a class of 25 eighth graders, five drink, two to five smoke regularly, and two to three use marijuana, Fowler emphasized that prevention is a community affair. "Studies show that if we can keep kids from abusing alcohol, cigarettes or other drugs before age 21 ... they are very unlikely to abuse drugs as adults, so that is prevention [of] diabetes, lung cancer, emphysema, etc."

While education may help prevent self-inflicted abuse, it is even more difficult to prevent physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse of someone else. According to Kathleen Delpha, Women's Support and Community Services, abuse can lead to anxiety, high blood pressure, panic attacks, stomach ulcers, severe depression and chemical dependency. Sherrie White, representing Woman's Place, expanded on verbal and emotional abuse. "The old saying 'Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me' is so wrong. There is severe damage from name calling and words."

Sharing about a 73-year-old assault victim, Ed Stout, Aid for Victims of Crime, Inc., urged attendees to consider violent crime as a health issue. "The physical problems resulting from the extreme levels of stress can last for weeks, months and years."

The St. Louis forum also echoed statewide concern for Missouri's seniors. Speakers said many seniors do not profit from programs that could help them because they do not know about available support services. Gloria Davis, Home Health Care, added that state budget cuts have excluded some elderly from eligibility for home

care. "I think all elderly people are entitled to this service regardless of their ability to pay or what their situation is," she said. Other presenters recommended

"Learning to cope with an abuser requires skills that most people don't have access to. Had I not found Women's Place that has counseling, I would be living in fear."

Sherrie White, Woman's Place, Maplewood

programs to teach families to provide proper care for their elderly relatives. Senior incontinence and lack of Medicare coverage for adult diapers and nutrition supplements were among the medical services discussed.

A survey conducted by the International Institute of St. Louis showed immigrants as another population with diverse needs. Citing the survey, Suzann LeLaurin stated that 44 percent of respondents experienced gaps in basic health care, while 82 percent lacked mental health care. Speaking for Bosnian immigrants, Iliana Todorova Morero, Harmony in Life, explained that many immigrants need mental health services because of war trauma.

St. Louis, Missouri

Affordable, accessible health care remains the overall problem. Many low-income workers – even full-time workers – have no insurance and find it difficult to pay for health care. According to Janet Tillmon, Paraquad, people with disabilities also find it difficult to pay and often

“The mother of a 7-year-old boy spent four hours on the phone calling over 30 dentists in Jefferson County to find out what she already knew. There is extremely limited availability to health care and dental care to children that are on Medicaid.”

Tracey King, Jefferson County Community Partnership, Barnhart

skip regular checkups, leading to secondary health care issues that themselves become costly.

Some geographic areas, like Jefferson County, have a shortage of health care providers. “We have four times the ... state average number of people per provider, and the providers we do have often accept only a limited number



of Medicaid patients or none at all,” said Dennis Diehl, Jefferson County Health Department, noting that 20 percent of the county is on Medicaid. Dentists, in particular, are scarce. Tracey King, Jefferson County Community Partnership, said for approximately 40,000 people on Medicaid, there is one dentist in the 650-square-mile area who accepts it. The county’s solution is a coalition to provide dental services to children and educate them about caring for their teeth.

In addition to treatment for health problems, speakers encouraged prevention. One presenter stressed the importance of catching health problems early through regular check-ups. Others focused on children, emphasizing screening for Type II diabetes and obesity. Another speaker recommended

collaborating with non-health care organizations, stating that these groups have established trust in the community and might help tackle health care issues.

The foundation was impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of those who spoke at the St. Louis forum and looks forward to working with these communities to make health care more accessible for everyone.



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