

# Forum Focus

## Joplin, Missouri



**T**he Missouri Foundation for Health's seventh forum of 2003 was held on July 22 at Missouri Southern State College in Joplin. Attended by 42 citizens, the forum was co-sponsored by Southwest Area Health Education Center and featured speakers from Joplin, Springfield, Carthage and Lamar.

Whether as part of a list or the main emphasis, the growing Hispanic community remains a concern for many in southwest Missouri. According to Lynda Homa, Carthage Community Clinic, many Hispanics move to southwest Missouri to provide better lives for their families. Although their living conditions may improve, they often lack health insurance, hindering their ability to access care. Homa's clinic, which provides free health care to the uninsured, wants to expand education and health care services to meet these families' needs. "We believe that access to quality health care is the right of every individual."

Leaf Running-rabbit, Joplin Language Center, said some towns' Hispanic populations are experiencing 1,000 percent growth; therefore it is important to have bilingual people in key positions. In many cases, children learn English, but their parents do

not. He said, "... children are being used as translators in the hospital, and children should not be used for this purpose." Mark Tozzio, St. John's Regional Medical Center, advocated going into schools to get students – particularly Hispanic students – interested in health care professions, encouraging them to get educated and then practice in southwest Missouri.

Methamphetamines are an epidemic in southwest Missouri, said Edward Duff, Narcotics Anonymous and National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), stating that one of every 740 people in Jasper County was arrested for manufacturing meth last year. Jim Rives, Burrell Behavioral Health, and Connie Mosbaugh, Southwest Missouri Community Alliance, both attributed high child abuse rates to meth use.

Mosbaugh expanded on child abuse in Jasper and Newton counties, describing coalitions her organization formed to address several family-related issues. One example is a 14-week parenting skills program that has successfully reduced child abuse incidences and improved family relationships.

**S**peakers listed lack of insurance coverage, resources and funding as issues for the mentally ill. Paula Baker, Ozark Center, mentioned the high cost of medication as one of the biggest barriers for those suffering from mental disorders. Duff called the lack of insurance coverage and high medication costs a "discrimination against brain disorders," noting that "the brain is part of the body too."

Jerry Mahaffey, NAMI member and father of two mentally ill daughters, highlighted the need for funds to sustain family training and support groups as well as additional beds at area hospitals. "My daughter had an episode a while back and had to be sent to Nevada because there were no more beds in Joplin."

**"If you think we are living in business as usual in southwest Missouri, that is wrong. ... Ten percent of the local population is addicted to meth."**

**Edward Duff, Narcotics Anonymous and National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, Joplin**

According to Angela Wessell, Burrell Behavioral Health, state budget cuts are affecting care for children. "About 5 percent of our country's children have a serious

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emotional disturbance, but only 1 percent get served, and with funding cuts, we will have fewer children served." Wessell emphasized the necessity of collaborating with all child-serving agencies to better these children's lives.

**A**lthough the health needs of the Hispanic community, substance abuse and mental health were among the most urgent concerns mentioned in Joplin, they were not the only ones. Nina Brueckner, a grantee from the Community Clinic of Joplin, mentioned various ongoing health disparities, including dental

**"Most of our patients are gainfully employed, both mother and father work, but they simply don't have health insurance and have to make a choice whether to buy food, put gas in the car or see a doctor."**

**Nina Brueckner, Community Clinic of Joplin, Joplin**

care for children and high percentages of uninsured residents. Daniel Pekarek, Joplin City Health Department, shared a community health survey that identified dental health, teen

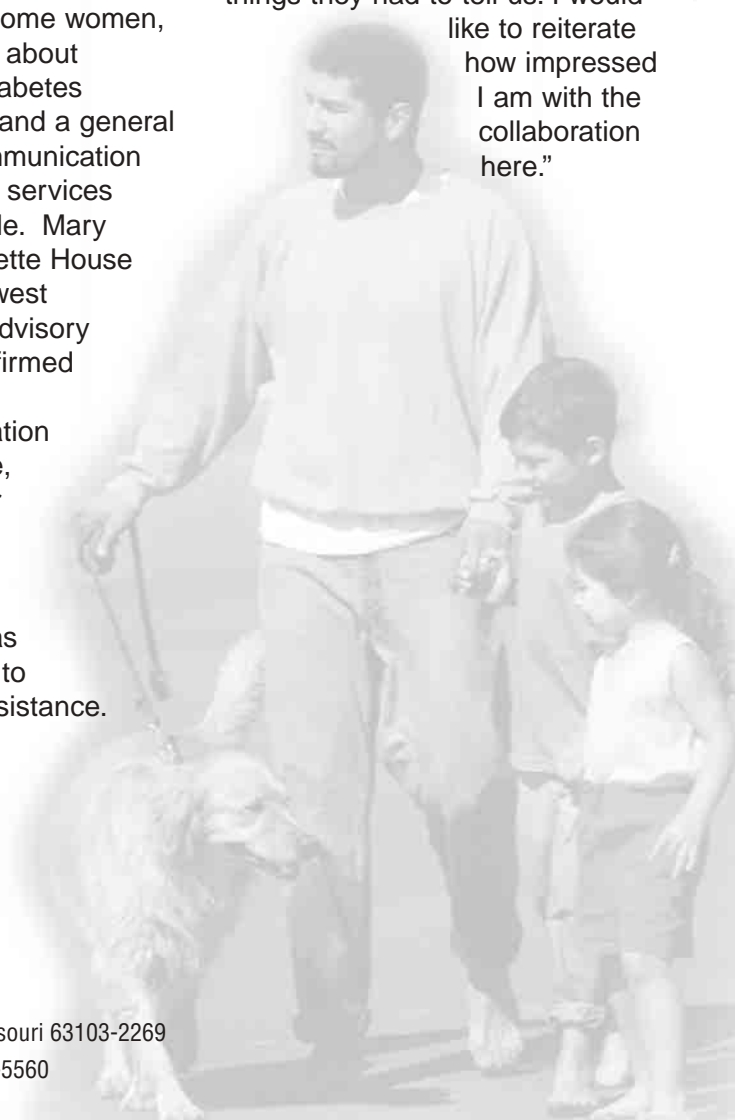


pregnancy, child health, substance abuse, water quality and communicable disease vaccination as Joplin's most immediate problems.

Representing a collaborative of several organizations, Lori Cable spoke about accessibility to the thin prep pap smear test, especially for low-income women, and added concerns about children, diabetes prevention and a general lack of communication about what services are available. Mary Duff, Lafayette House and Southwest Regional Advisory Council, affirmed lack of communication as an issue, sharing her

experiences as a homeless woman, diagnosed with fibromyalgia, who was consistently referred to someone else for assistance.

The foundation was encouraged by southwest Missouri's willingness to work together to resolve these health issues. James Kimmey, MD, MFH president and CEO, said, "This has been one of the meatiest forums we've had in terms of content, the number of folks who signed up and the things they had to tell us. I would like to reiterate how impressed I am with the collaboration here."



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