

# Forum Focus

## Kennett, Missouri



**A**ttracting 68 citizens from Dunklin, Stoddard, Pemiscot, New Madrid, Cape Girardeau, Butler, Greene and St. Louis counties, the Missouri Foundation for Health's fourth 2003 forum was held on May 21 at Kennett's American Legion Hall. Southeastern Missouri Area Health Education Center was the co-sponsor.

Fifteen speakers shared concerns about health issues in the Bootheel, focusing mainly on the detrimental effects of state budget cuts. During his presentation, MFH President and CEO James R. Kimmey, MD, reinforced the foundation's commitment to the region, noting that \$4.5 million in grants have impacted the Bootheel.

**A**ccording to Dan Brachman of Southeast Missouri Health Network in New Madrid, family planning programs are one victim of budget cuts. His organization is federally funded and continues to offer these services in Scott, Stoddard, Mississippi, Dunklin, Pemiscot and New Madrid counties, but the New Madrid County Health Department has been forced to end its family planning program.

Teen pregnancy continues to be a major concern. Richard Montgomery with the Butler County Health Department Board

of Trustees in Poplar Bluff pointed out that Missouri has one of the lowest average birth weights in the country, with southeast Missouri leading the state. Minnie Sanders said Dunklin County Caring Council is using one of two grants to prevent teen pregnancy, one of the chief causes of low birth weight. A second grant is being used to treat domestic and/or sexual abuse victims.

"Victims will be able to receive services here and not have to go to Cape Girardeau. That makes it much better for the victims, especially the children," she said.

**I**n addition to family planning, Brachman also highlighted the barriers migrant workers face in accessing care. Although the network currently has a program providing health and social service assistance for Spanish-speaking residents, he said there is still much to be done for this population. Cheryl White, also with Southeast Missouri Health Network, spoke specifically about dental problems in migrant workers and children. Thanks to a grant from the foundation, her organization has a portable

dental unit that has seen over 300 children and provided care in the field for migrant workers.

Respiratory and cardiovascular diseases also are prevalent in the Bootheel. In performing sleep and respiratory assessments, Sleep Analysts, Inc. has identified numerous COPD and asthma

**"... no matter what the governor ends up signing or having passed over his veto from the Missouri legislature, all Title V funds for family planning are history as of June."**

**Richard Montgomery, Butler County Health Department Board of Trustees, Poplar Bluff**

cases. "The more the population ages, the more COPD will come into play with the baby boomer population who started smoking at a young age. Medicare will pay for that, but Medicaid will not," said Roddy Holmes. Debbie Leoni with Southeast Hospital in Jackson added that smoking cessation also is important for those who have had heart attacks or suffer from hypertension.

**B**udget cuts also are affecting mental health care. Tommy Allgood of Family Counseling Center in Kennett said Butler County has one of the

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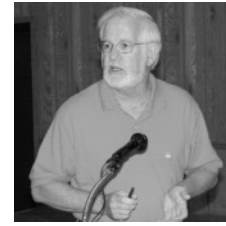
highest rates of self-infliction for injury and suicide in the state. He emphasized the need for mental health services for children and additionally mentioned the deaf as a specific group the organization has difficulty servicing, noting that the Americans with Disabilities Act requires it to provide a qualified

**“I just can’t say enough what a challenge it is for [migrant workers] in this area just to access services because so many of the agencies simply do not have someone available [who] can translate.”**

**Shawn Sando, Family Counseling Center, Kennett**

interpreter. “Is that person here in Kennett or in Poplar Bluff? No. We have to hire someone to come down from St. Louis.”

**S**pecialists in general are difficult to access in the Bootheel. Kevin Sexton, Cross Trails Medical Center in Cape Girardeau, suggested telemedicine as one solution, stating that even when doctors in St. Louis or Kansas City agree to see patients, transportation is still an issue. One specialist, Chancellor Wayne, D.C., Wayne



Chiropractic, noted that he is in Southeast Missouri but Medicare covers only partial services, and Medicaid covers none.

Several speakers expressed growing concerns about the elderly. “We see patients every day [who] have to decide whether they want to eat or they want to take their medications,” said Teresa McCulloch, Visiting Nurse

Association of Southeast Missouri. She added that seniors want to stay in their homes as long as possible and advocated a “Senior Companion Services” program that would pair up seniors and encourage them to help each other.

**J**an McElwrath of the Kennett Chamber of Commerce was the final speaker of the evening. She emphasized the importance of health

care to bringing businesses and employers into the area and encouraged attendees to ask their chambers and economic development groups for assistance in improving their communities’ health, as it is an issue that affects all aspects of a community’s sustainability and well-being.



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