

Forum Focus

Macon, Missouri



On July 10, the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) kicked off the second half of 2003 forums at First Christian Church in Macon. Northeast Missouri Area Health Education Center co-sponsored the event, which attracted 68 citizens from 11 counties.

Two grant recipients started the forum, sharing how they are making a difference in their communities. Northeast Missouri Health Council has fully equipped a new facility in Milan and is purchasing a mobile dental chair to increase its capacity to provide oral health care services. Macon County Samaritan Memorial Hospital is installing a machine to dispense medication to enhance patient safety.

The shortage of health care professionals and workers in northeast Missouri was the most common concern voiced at the forum. Phyllis Krambeck, Missouri Coalition for Quality Care (MCQC), Kirksville, drew attention to the shortage of ombudsmen to investigate complaints in long-term care facilities, explaining how ombudsmen could solve many issues before they get to MCQC. Her husband, Henry Krambeck, described a successful program with Truman State University's Phi Beta Gamma chapter that trains students as certified ombudsmen.

As part of the organization's service requirements, the university has placed 16 students, and the Krambecks expressed interest in expanding this program.

In contrast, Clarita Casey, Pershing Hospital, emphasized a lack of health education opportunities, specifically for laboratory technicians. She highlighted the difficulty of recruiting technicians from other areas, even if they grew up in northeast Missouri. "Some young people get scholarships and go off to school and never come back ... they stay in the city," she said, mentioning an employee who would get training if it were available near Brookfield.

Don Crosby, Adair County Ambulance District, wants to provide EMT training, but he needs a building and equipment. Crosby also expressed concern about prenatal care for women in Kirksville, noting the number of doctors delivering babies has gone from 10 to six due to high malpractice insurance.

According to Steve Long, a Marceline Community Health Center volunteer, Marceline's health care started declining when its community hospital was purchased and its doctors acquired by other systems.

Two of the hospital's physicians would like to return to Marceline, but both are nearing retirement, and funds remain an issue.

State budget cuts and low Medicaid/Medicare reimbursements provide additional barriers to providing care. Ray Magers, Putnam County Memorial Hospital, said rural areas have a high population of underserved and uninsured elderly and an above average uninsured rate. "My personal feeling is that the state legislature and other agencies do not realize

"[I'm] just very concerned that in the future OB-GYN will be spelled EMT, and birthing centers will be six tires and lights and sirens going down the road."

Don Crosby, Adair County Ambulance District, Kirksville

Missouri exists north of the Missouri River," he stated. Michele McClain, Preferred Family Healthcare, Kirksville, said changes in Medicaid have reduced her organization's ability to serve those with mental illness and substance abuse issues.

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Rene McGovern shared how ElderLynk is helping the elderly receive integrated mental health and primary care services, but distance, lack of funds and difficulty recruiting workers provide challenges. Valentina Mensa, Milan Centro Latino, highlighted the Hispanic community as another population that suffers, needing programs to help them understand how to access care.

Prevention and collaboration were other issues presented. Doris Fountain, A.T. Still University, asked citizens to help implement the Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Prevention Project, which recently received a



primary focus of prevention instead of direct care.

Nancy Waters and Carol Spencer, Girl Scouts, spoke about prevention programs for girls. Waters advocated self-defense classes, citing a Girl Scout study revealing 60.7 percent of girls between 15 and 17 fear for their safety, particularly date rape and domestic violence. Spencer expanded on a more general prevention program for girls, sharing how Girl Scouts helps girls grow mentally, physically and emotionally.

Collaboration has been a focus at many of the foundation's forums, and Macon was no exception. Speakers were willing to cooperate but expressed a need for leadership and further resources. Magers noted that the guidelines for federal grants sometimes cause organizations to compete rather than work together. Austin explained, "We are all in our little silos doing our own thing. And some of the systems that we work within

interfere – really are barriers – to our working together."

MFH Community Advisory Council member John Grossmeier urged them to keep trying. "With the power that is present in this room tonight ... there is no doubt that we will be able to successfully address many of the issues that you have shared with us this evening."

"We are not very attractive to the young doctors graduating, who grew up in a city somewhere and who want to go back and practice in the city."

Steve Long, Marceline Community Health Center, Marceline

foundation grant. Kathy Austin, Macon County Health Department, expressed a desire to get back to the department's



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