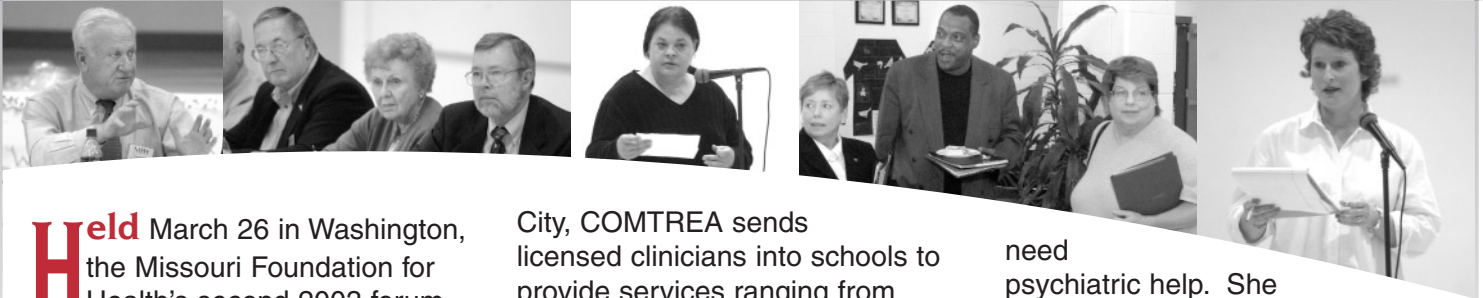


Forum Focus

Washington, Missouri



Held March 26 in Washington, the Missouri Foundation for Health's second 2003 forum attracted 32 attendees. Targeted toward residents of Franklin, Crawford, Gasconade, Warren, Washington and Jefferson counties, the forum also attracted speakers from St. Louis City and County. Washington West Elementary hosted the forum, which was co-sponsored by the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Bureau of Special Health Care Needs.

As in past forums, the foundation heard many concerns in Washington, but the first three speakers added a previously unheard viewpoint. All grant recipients, they shared how their grants are making a positive health impact in their communities.

According to Dan McKinney, Hermann Area District Hospital has used its grant to replace outdated radiology equipment and will soon replace its heating and air conditioning system. Located in Gasconade County, the hospital serves 16,000 people.

Ghada Sultani-Hoffman of COMTREA Community Treatment Inc., a mental health center, explained how her organization has expanded services in area schools. Serving Jefferson and St. Louis counties and St. Louis

City, COMTREA sends licensed clinicians into schools to provide services ranging from individual and group therapy to educational presentations for students and faculty.

The third grant recipient, Suzann Weller with the Disability Resource Association, shared how her organization can now provide additional transportation services to Jefferson County residents. She estimated they provide over 2,500 trips per year. "As a whole, this grant has helped many Jefferson County residents receive medical transportation that is greatly needed."

While feedback from these speakers showed how the foundation's efforts have provided some relief and assistance, the remainder of the forum reinforced the amount of work still needed to improve the lives and health of Missourians.

As at almost every forum the foundation has held to date, including this year's Ironton forum, the Washington forum brought forth many speakers concerned about mental health and related health issues. In fact, more than one-half of the speakers focused on mental health. Eileen Roth, Family Wellness Program, stated that 1,540 children in Franklin County

need psychiatric help. She and other speakers highlighted a number of issues with which the community deals, including lack of insurance coverage for mental health services, the absence of inpatient care facilities for these types of health problems and the often related issues of substance abuse and domestic violence.

Joleene Unnerstall, Partnerships Against Domestic Violence Healing Services, suggested early childhood, adolescent and community education to offset domestic violence. Terry Buddemeyer with the Washington Ambulance District added that the lack of

"We had a designated Cover the Insured Week, but in reality, every week is uninsured week for people with mental illness."

Anita Morrison,
BRIDGES of Greater St. Louis, St. Louis

inpatient care for mental health and substance abuse issues leads to a larger caseload for emergency and law enforcement officials.

Diabetes, one of Missouri's major health problems, was another topic addressed at

Washington, Missouri

the Washington forum. According to Mary Laubinger, St. John's Mercy Hospital, Washington-area physicians have identified over 200 kids in their practices who are more than 100 pounds overweight. She advocated collaboration between physician office practices, the hospital and its outpatient diabetes program to improve treatment for diabetes patients and to better educate families about the risks for overweight children.

Not surprisingly, speakers also mentioned a lack of adequate dental services. "If we need to get oral surgery, we have to drive to Hannibal," said Darleen Hainline, Developmental Services of Franklin County. Dennis Kramme, Emmaus Homes Inc.,



retardation. He added that Emmaus' patients often have to return to Hannibal two or three times before the final work is done, incurring "a phenomenal expense" for both the organization and the patient.

In addition to specific medical and clinical health care issues, the foundation heard how financial issues are affecting the long-term health of Missourians. According to Sandy Crider of Loving Hearts Outreach in Washington, some patients have to spend \$500-600 on medication before their insurance kicks in, limiting the amount of care they can afford. "We have senior citizens also, as well as disabled individuals, that are functioning on \$450 a month, and yet they are getting \$10 a month in food stamps and they still have their medical co-pay," she added.

Also from Washington, Clara Cooper with Meals on Wheels asked for assistance in providing meals to the elderly and homebound. Even with a discounted price from the hospital,

some clients are unable to pay for their food.

In closing the forum, James R. Kimmey, MD, president and CEO of MFH, stressed the importance of networking and determining ways community organizations can collaborate to effect positive change.

**"Domestic violence is a disease.
Substance abuse is a disease.
It is a mental health problem
here in Franklin County."**

Virgil Smith, Phoenix Place, Washington

also expressed concerns about dental services, particularly for those with developmental disabilities and/or mental



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