

New Prevention Clinic offers regular, free health screenings



Photo by Michael F. Patterson Evelyn J. Frierson, director of the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance announces the opening of the new Prevention Clinic at Lafayette Medical Center. Frierson will serve as coordinator for the clinic.

FORT WAYNE—The battle to end health and healthcare disparities that effect people of color in Fort Wayne recently received a significant boost thanks to a new local organization.

Representatives from the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance Inc. (FWAACA), HealthVisions Fort Wayne, IPFW's School of Health Sciences and the Jeff Towles Health Disparity Initiative and a number of other progressive healthcare organizations gathered at the Lafayette Medical Center, 2700 S. Lafayette St., to announce the start of the innovative Prevention Clinic project. Every third Wednesday of the month, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., uninsured and underinsured persons in the area can receive free or low cost health screenings in Suite 100 in the medical center.

According to Evelyn J. Frierson, director of FWAACA and Prevention Clinic coordinator, the project grew out of findings of the Allen County Health Disparity Coalition that includes approximately 30 area healthcare providers. The United Way of Allen County's July 2004 Diversity Background Report indicates that 32 percent of the area black population and 8.9 percent of Hispanics are disproportionately represented in individuals living below the poverty level in 1999. Furthermore, the report stated, "In Wayne Township, 16.2 percent (17,615) of all residents were living below the poverty level. 7,252 of those residents were black...."

Prevention Clinic organizers also cited a recent Parkview Hospital health assessment study indicated that more than 19 percent of Allen County residents were without health insurance and 26 percent were 200 percent below poverty level.

Numerous studies show that those economic figures have translated into limited access to healthcare and healthcare education for low income persons, meaning they often are disproportionately more affected with health problems, particularly with chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, HIV and cancer. The Minority Health Coalition of Allen County was working to close the healthcare gap between minorities and the white, more affluent population by sponsoring a series of health fairs in the community until the organization closed its doors in 2003. A number of organizations began to pick up the slack by intermittently offering health fairs at local churches and other sites but, according to Prevention Clinic officials, "the opportunity for case management and follow up was relatively nonexistent."

Frierson said after holding these health fairs, she and others often were asked when and where the next one would be. Rather than having to wait for others to schedule events, the Health Disparity Coalition decided to organize the Prevention Clinic to offer those screenings and

educational activities on a regular basis. The Pontiac Medical Center was chosen as the site for the clinic because it lies in the central city area where much of the target population for the venture is located.

The project is funded in part by a federal grant to the Indiana University Medical School, explained Linda Finke, director of the Northeast Indiana Area Health Education Center School of Health Sciences at IPFW, but the services provided are largely in-kind donations from participating organizations. That, she said, makes the Prevention Clinic a unique venture not only here, but across the nation, said Finke.

“The collaboration that takes place in Fort Wayne is unusual,” said Finke, adding that healthcare providers here are not just talking but actually doing something.

Finke serves as a co-coordinator of the Prevention Clinic along with co-coordinators Renetta Williams, executive director of HealthVisions Fort Wayne, and Lititia HatcherRocque, executive director of the Jeff Towles Health Disparity Initiative, whose organization will monitor follow up for the clinic’s chronic care component.

The Prevention Clinic’s partner organizations are: Aging & InHome Services of Northeast Indiana; the AIDS Task Force; the Allen County Health Department; Alane Haney-Russell, M.D. of A Change Must Come; the American Heart Association; the American Red Cross; the Health Education Center of IPFW; Community Home Health Care; Community Transportation Network; the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance; Francine’s Friends Mobile Mammography Unit; HealthVisions Fort Wayne; Hoosier Healthwise health insurance program; the Jeff Towles Health Disparity Initiative; Matthew 25; Neighborhood Health Clinic; Park Center; Parkview Oncology Center; Parkview Women’s Resource Center; St. Joseph Community Health Foundation; University of St. Francis School of Nursing, and Visiting Nurse & Hospice Home.

The Prevention Clinic’s first screening session is scheduled for 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Jan. 18 at the Lafayette Medical Center, 2700 S. Lafayette St. While most of the services are free, staff recommends that persons with Medicare, Medicaid or other insurance bring their cards for convenience, as some of the screenings might be billable through insurance.

For more information, call the Fort Wayne African American Cancer Alliance at (260) 745-1600.