

Wellness Clinics Help Uninsured

A public health story from...

Stone County Health Department

Wellness clinics provide care for the uninsured.

*N*estled in the Ozark Mountains of Southwest Missouri, with 483 miles of lake shoreline, Stone County attracts tourists from all over the world. It has become a well-known getaway for Hollywood's rich and famous, such as Judge Judy, but Stone County residents struggle with ongoing economic and

health issues.

"Even though Stone County is one of the fastest growing counties in Missouri, over 24 percent of Stone County residents do not have health insurance," said Angela Ford, administrator, Stone County Health Department. "This is double the state rate of 12 percent and has become a real health concern."

For the past two years, the health department has been operating two wellness-screening clinics for residents over the age of 18 who do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare and cannot afford health insurance. Over the past year, 380 residents have received free medical exams through the clinics.

"Just by offering the basic medical exams, we have caught significant health issues which would otherwise have gone undetected," said Angela. "We recently had a 44-year-old woman who came to the clinic for her yearly physical. The clinical exam revealed cancer of the cervix." Follow-up with a specialist confirmed advanced uterine cancer; the client is now receiving chemotherapy after a successful surgery.

With county obesity rates on the rise, there is concern of increased high blood pressure and diabetes that could lead to serious health problems if not treated. If a client's laboratory screening reveals a potential problem, a health department nurse assists the client in obtaining medical care from one of nine county physicians who have agreed to care for those without insurance.

Angela describes another success story of a 57-year-old female who came to the clinic with a history of uncontrolled diabetes. Her blood test indicated an elevated cholesterol and glucose level. Because of the work provided by the clinic, she received case management, and is now seen on a regular basis by a primary health care provider.

"Our wellness clinics have made a significant impact on the lives of the uninsured residents of Stone County," said Angela. "Unfortunately, our grant funding ends in June 2008, so we are hoping to obtain additional local funding to support the continuation of the wellness clinics."

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