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BEYOND THE BEDSIDE

HOW YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL INVESTS IN COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

BY DEBRA STEVCO MILLER

YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL CARES MORE ABOUT YOU THAN YOU PROBABLY REALIZE.

Separate from the emergencies, scheduled surgeries, and necessary recovery days, hospital staff also work closely with community partners to bring forward programs for area individuals offering benefits to provide assistance in specific situations, raise awareness of wellness activities, or guide people to a healthier lifestyle.

For some hospitals, examples of aid might include food sufficiency, stable housing, transportation, education, literacy, support groups, and safe neighborhoods.

To ensure that these free or discounted hospital programs are being fully utilized, every three years a community health needs assessment is conducted by the hospitals with their community partners to help weigh the needs of their residents and evaluate current offerings.

The focus on health education, treatment and prevention through this outreach results in positive outcomes not just for the benefit of the individual but also hospital emergency departments, which then become less crowded while efficiency rises for other medical services. Addressing broader health needs and caring for a community beyond just treatments helps enhance a hospital's reputation within the vicinities it serves as well.

According to a New Jersey Hospital Association (NJHA) report, New Jersey hospitals' commitment to their surrounding neighborhoods and residents reaches \$3.5 billion annually, based on 2021 data. Wellness efforts such as health screenings and vaccinations totaled \$56 million.

The wellness programs at Flemington-based Hunterdon Health are routinely evaluated with input from focus groups, surveys, and quarterly meetings of the Partnership for Health which is comprised of action teams from 70 multisector organizations that focus on meeting social determinants of health goals outside the traditional definition of health care.

"We want to get the community's voice to see what they think are the needs in the community as far as their health and wellness," said Kim Blanda, RN, director of community relations for Hunterdon Health. "So that's how we decide where we're going to put our resources and our efforts."

Then, a community health improvement plan is created based on that feedback for practices and facilities spread throughout the five counties of Hunterdon, Somerset, Mercer, Morris and Warren.

"The hospital has a very robust health team made up of doctors and nurses and other health care professionals who are continuously looking at our quality metrics," Blanda said. "Obviously, sometimes we have to be flexible since things can change, but we're constantly looking at the data and the difference we're making."

Their Produce Prescription Program is one example of combining health care and nutrition for their five-county residents. Grow-A-Row and the Hunterdon ShopRite

Left to right: Shauna Alvarez of America's Grow a Row, Kristen McKee of Hunterdon Health and Tristan Wallack of America's Grow a Row take part in Hunterdon Health's Produce Prescription Program, which combines health care and nutrition for its five-county residents. ➔

Photo courtesy of Hunterdon Health



➔ The BioMed class at Hunterdon Central High School benefits from hospital programs that encourage discussion with medical professionals and even feature a traveling anatomy exhibit.

Photo courtesy of Hunterdon Health



➔ Hospital staff work closely with community partners to bring forward programs for area individuals offering benefits to provide assistance in specific situations, raise awareness of wellness activities, or guide people to a healthier lifestyle.

Photo courtesy of Getty Images

University Hospital in Newark goes beyond its walls to meet residents where they are, providing essential health services, education, and support to improve community well-being. ➔

Photos courtesy of University Hospital

are partners in this effort to provide good eats and recipes, increase personal activity, control diabetes, and address food insecurity. The School Backpack program does the same for 100 schoolchildren who lack sustenance on the weekends.

"It's the power of collaboration," Blanda said. "If we work together, we can make a larger impact than working by ourselves. That's what we really strive to do."

Another program was introduced here recently for drivers with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The Blue Envelope program provides an important visual cue to assist law enforcement communications during a traffic stop. Designed to reduce anxiety for the driver and eliminate misunderstandings, the distinctive envelope contains medical and official documents as well as instructions for both parties on how to handle the situation. This helps create a positive interaction during any such incidents.

Other hospital programs include medication access, a Latino coalition, health care screenings, senior and aging issues, opportunities for teens to shadow hospital staff, a biomedical program that encourages conversations with medical personnel, and even a traveling anatomy exhibit.

Some of their classes include CPR, babysitting courses, Baby Steps for new parents, hypnobirthing, breastfeeding support, Youth Art Bereavement Program, and caregiver support.

For more information, visit:
HUNTERDONHEALTH.ORG

In Newark, University Hospital (UH) is a Level 1 Trauma Center and public academic medical center safety net for many individuals with inadequate or no health insurance coverage who require access to care. Just last July, the hospital opened a new full-service Ambulatory Care Clinic in the Fairmount neighborhood, which offers comprehensive primary and specialty care appointments for those who do not have a dedicated doctor. Uniquely situated above the clinic are 78 affordable rental apartments for low- and moderate-income residents.

Rutgers Medical School student conducts a community health screening for University Hospital in Newark. ➔



In their ongoing commitment to serve their residents, University Hospital teams from Community Affairs, Trauma Injury Prevention and Outreach, Emergency Medical Services, and the Population Health departments educate and deliver many resources such as emergency clothing, cancer screenings, violence intervention, and medical training classes.

One of the hospital's newest programs is Mammography in Motion for those who do not have easy access to transportation. This year-old project mobilizes women's health care with 3D breast cancer screenings and gynecological procedures in the comfort of a modernized pink and white coach bus that travels around Essex County to various churches, community centers, and health clinics. Insurance is not required.

For the men, there is a free annual Men's Health Summit scheduled in June at the hospital offering various workshops, screenings and resources.

There are also interactive opportunities like the Back-to-School Bike Rodeo, which provides families with free helmets and helmet fittings, school supplies, bike/car seat inspections, riding and e-scooter courses, and ambulance tours.

➔ One of University Hospital's newest programs is Mammography in Motion for those individuals in the community who do not have easy access to transportation.

"By serving the community, we ensure that we meet them where they are," explained Keshia Brandon, community affairs specialist. "Much of our community members are uninsured and underinsured and so we don't let that deter us from providing services to them."

In addition, every month the community can take advantage of a specific health topic presented by a physician and accompanied by blood pressure and glucose screenings held at the hospital and in the surrounding community. This month, the topic is focused on nutrition. In April, discussions will center on organ donation.

For more information, visit:
UHNJ.ORG/FOR-COMMUNITY

The NJHA notes that across the state more than 2,500 health fairs and other community health events are held annually and that roughly 12% of every dollar spent by New Jersey hospitals is devoted to community health initiatives. ❖