

New diabetes program saves lives

by Marlene Harris

Diabetes is on the rise in Wisconsin. At least 6,000 children have been diagnosed, and roughly 1.06 million adults 20 years and older have pre-diabetes. This represents a large increase since 2005.

Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital & Clinics is doing something about it.

In 2009 the newly expanded SPMHC program, Diabetes Self-Management Education, received the esteemed American Diabetes Association certification. This requires a rigorous review by nationwide experts. JoEllen Frawley is a 20-year diabetes educator, who joined the SPMHC team in 2008 to head the advanced program.

“Our goal is to equip patients with information and skills to prevent life-altering complications from the disease,” said Frawley. “We have everything our patients need to be successful.”

Frawley is an advanced practice nurse prescriber, board certified in advanced diabetes, and a certified diabetes educator. With her certifications, the program can offer important services like insulin pump training and continuous glucose monitoring.

Help for managing diabetes

The pancreas makes insulin, a hormone that helps move glucose (sugar) from the blood to muscles and other tissues. Insulin controls blood sugar levels. These levels become too high when the pancreas doesn't make enough insulin or there is a defect in how it's used —diabetes is the result.

Not everyone experiences all the symptoms: extreme thirst, frequent urination, intense fatigue, unexplained weight loss, blurry vision, and dry, itchy skin.

Although no cure exists, research shows that lifestyle changes decrease complications and even prevent the disease. An increase in diabetes affects the whole community. Health care costs rise and so does absenteeism from work and school.

The SPMHC diabetes team consists of a certified diabetes educator, registered dietitians, registered nurses, primary care providers, and pharmacists. Diabetes management is 99 percent self-care, so classes offer tools to help people control the disease.

Frawley said, “With today’s medications and technology, the disease is manageable; prevention is the key.”

John Griffing, a 34-year-old Lodi firefighter and father of three girls, was in excellent health when he started to experience symptoms in 2008.

“Lodi Medical Clinic diagnosed me with diabetes and referred me to JoEllen and the new program,” said Griffing. “Going to classes and learning from her empowered me.”

Diabetes Self-Management Education offers four different classes that focus on solutions. The program encourages families to attend. The small, comfortable groups are perfect for sharing concerns and asking questions.

Class topics include emergency treatment, coping skills, medication, prevention techniques, and monitoring blood sugars, to name just a few.

Frawley said, “People tell me the classes motivate them, which is important. Diabetes is a slow, progressive disease that affects the kidneys, eyes, nerves, heart, skin, and feet. It’s not the disease but the complications that kill people.

“We need to help patients develop healthy habits. Research shows that one out of three children born after 2000 will have diabetes because of an unhealthy lifestyle. We believe that our program can make a difference.”

The Diabetes Self-Management Education program includes individual appointments with Frawley — assessments, consultations and follow-up. She usually checks patients’ progress every three to six months.

JoEllen Frawley

“I’m excited about the program and how it encourages people to take control,” said Frawley. “Some people like to come in often because it helps motivate them. For me, it’s another opportunity to help them create fulfilling lives, which I’m delighted to do.

“I’ve seen my own family members struggle with diabetes from lack of information and instruction. People don’t have to experience that anymore.”

As a child, Frawley thought about becoming a doctor someday but decided on nursing instead. Now, as an advanced practice nurse prescriber, she can issue prescriptions. This benefits her patients.

“One reason I came to (SPMHC) is the mission they live by: extraordinary health care from the heart, one person at a time. I share that philosophy. The quality of care I provide is more important than how many patients I see in a day.”

Frawley graduated Madison General Hospital School of Nursing in 1981. She received her bachelor's in nursing with honors from Viterbo University in 1998 and in 2004 her master's in nursing.

Firefighter Griffing said, "I feel great — my blood sugar has improved, and my energy is back. Plus, my whole family has benefited. We're eating healthier, and we're exercising together."

To schedule an appointment with JoEllen Frawley at Plain Medical Clinic or Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital, call 608-546-4211.

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