

## RMCHCS team reports to commission on diabetes study

Written by By Rick Abasta Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 18 May 2018 07:01

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### Warning: Report isn't stellar

During the May 16 regular meeting of the McKinley County Board of Commissioners, Rehoboth McKinley County Christian Health Services reported on an effort to study diabetes prevention for the area.

Jean Baltz, director of the Diabetes Prevention Program, provided an overview of the high number of adults with diabetes.

She said the hospital was awarded a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for pre-diabetes or diabetes prevention.

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With a background in chronic disease management, Baltz previously worked for Humana in Louisville and the Memorial Hermann Physician Network in Houston.

“I’m really happy to be here to bring some of my expertise in grant writing as well as chronic disease management, specifically diabetes,” she said.

Lisa Rodriguez and Clementine Miller are her team members. They are responsible for the physical activity component and data analysis for the program.

“McKinley County is often referred to as the epicenter of the epidemic of diabetes and pre-diabetes and obesity,” she said. “We unfortunately have some of the highest numbers in not just the U.S., but the world for diagnosis of specifically, diabetes.”

The obesity level in McKinley County is at 35 percent. The highest rate of obesity in the U.S. is in Louisiana and Mississippi, which is commonly called the “obesity belt.”

The current rate for adults with diabetes in McKinley County is 13.6 percent. Across state line in Arizona, the Navajo Nation has a rate of 21 percent for adults with Type 2 diabetes.

For the U.S., 34 percent of the entire population has pre-diabetes. This means one in three people have pre-diabetes or diabetes.

The statistics are sobering and the progression from newly onset cases of diabetes to requiring shots of insulin happens here within two to three years. For the rest of the country, this progression rate is usually within 10 years.

“We don’t quite know the reason. I have a number of other grant requests out to study these aspects,” Baltz said.

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The Diabetes Prevention Program follows the Lifestyle Change Program that was created by the Centers for Disease Control. The program started 20 years ago in Indianapolis and has been funded globally since that time.

The four-year funding for Rehoboth is underway and the team selected their first cohort for the study. Participants will have a one-year commitment to participate in 16 sessions for the first six months and six sessions in the second half of the year.

“Finding participants that are very committed to their determination to change their behavior or lose weight is important,” she said. “We are rigorously trying to screen not just those who qualify, but those who would also qualify and be committed.”

The first cohort session will take place at the Rehoboth Christian School Wellness Center on June 25, from 4:30 to 6:30 pm.

Participation in the study is free. The program has a value of several thousand dollars. Registration for participants began recently during the health fair at the mall.

“In my booth, we actually tested over 200 blood sugars,” she said, referring to the stick test diagnosis.

Individuals who are overweight with a body mass index over 25 can apply for the program if they are 18 or older. Individuals who have been diagnosed with diabetes can apply.

People who score five or higher on the diabetes screening test can also apply.

“You have to be a certain weight to get a certain number of points. If you’re a man, you automatically get one point,” she said. “If you have gestational diabetes, that guarantees you

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entrance into the program.”

Baltz requested permission from commissioners to recruit participants from county worksites during lunch break or staff meetings. The team would employ the stick test, screen test and other methods to determine eligibility.

She also asked if the county could disseminate information on the program.

Chairwoman Genevieve Jackson said there are several area programs currently studying diabetes as well.

“You mentioned studying people close to the vicinity of Gallup. Rural areas need it the most and they often have no transportation,” she said.

Baltz said the first cohort will be locally, but the program has plans to expand to the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo, possibly.

Each cohort consists of 20 individuals and there will be about five cohorts for the study.

Commissioner Carol Bowman-Muskett said, “Every one of us in this room is affected. It’s tough,” she said.

In response to the request for participation from the commission, one leader stepped forward.

Commissioner Bill Lee volunteered to serve as the champion from the commission and is going to participate in the study.

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“I’ve got a high number (from the screening test), maybe I can be that champion. Madam Chair, I’d like to volunteer to do that,” he said.

By Rick Abasta

Sun Correspondent