

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Impact Poverty Holds November Meeting

Paducah, KY November 16, 2010 – The Impact Poverty Task Force held its monthly meeting on Friday, November 12, 2010 at Lourdes Hospital in the Marshall Nemer Pavilion.

Kristin Williams, task force facilitator, welcomed the group and introduced Marianne Potina, the facilitator for the day. Marianne is the Vice President of Mission Integration at Lourdes Hospital and an Impact Poverty Task Force member. Marianne introduced a panel of individuals that would speak to the group about different aspects of healthcare in Paducah and McCracken County. The Task Force was interested in hearing from the panel to gain a better understanding of the medical needs in our area and programs currently available to serve those in poverty.

The panel included Charlie Ross, Executive Director of the Purchase District Health Department, Anita Wyatt, Executive Director of St. Nicholas Family Free Clinic and Candy Lawrence and Hannah Allen, both from First Source, a private company that works with Lourdes and other hospitals to assist “self pay” patients.

Charlie Ross opened the discussion by giving an overview of the Health Department, a public health agency offering programs for home health, maternal and child health, epidemiology and chronic diseases, and environmental health. He explained that one of the largest programs for low-income residents is “WIC,” government assistance for women, infants and children. The main goal of WIC is to protect or improve the health/nutritional status of low-income clients through nutrition education and services, breastfeeding promotion/education, a monthly food prescription of nutritious foods, and access to maternal, prenatal, and pediatric health care services. The Health Department offers childhood immunizations and prenatal care for low income families and is involved in prevention programs focusing on diabetes and sexually transmitted diseases.

Next, Anita Wyatt spoke about the St. Nicholas Family Clinic. She gave an overview of the facility, which serves eight counties and totaled over 4,000 visits last year. Demand for services is increasing and, as of October, the Clinic has already provided more than 5,000 visits this year. She discussed the Clinic’s requirements to receive services, explaining that a community member must work a minimum of 15 hours per week to qualify for treatment at St. Nicholas, must present their last two pay stubs as proof of employment and must be at no more than 185% of poverty guidelines. Anita said, “St. Nicholas is looking to fill the need for individuals who have fallen between the cracks of the healthcare system. Unfortunately, many think that the mere presence of St. Nicholas means that the healthcare needs are met in our community. That is far from the case.”

Candy Lawrence and Hannah Allen spoke about First Source, which is a program for uninsured and underinsured patients. Candy is based at Lourdes Hospital and serves as an advocate for patients regarding financial assistance.

Discussion highlights included:

- Low income individuals and families tend to put off healthcare, which leads to chronic illness.
- There is a difference between having insurance, and having access to healthcare. Although many aspects of healthcare are “covered” under Medicaid, the number of Medicaid providers is dwindling.
- There is a gap in the system. Some individuals will refuse a pay raise at work so they will continue to qualify for medical assistance. The pay raise doesn’t compensate for the loss in medical coverage.
- The concept of a privately funded “Medical Home” was introduced to the group. These are “one stop shops” where patients can be assessed, have lab work and see a physician, all in one facility. This helps limit the time away from work and the amount of travel required to access various services, both important to low-income patients. The concept of a Federally Qualified Health Center was also introduced. The Task Force will further investigate the impact these types of facilities could have on our community.
- There is a desperate need for dental care in our community
- St. Nicolas Clinic provides vital medical services for a segment of our population that is not eligible for Medicaid, doesn’t have employer-provided healthcare and can’t afford to self-pay, however, the number of people they can treat is limited. St. Nicholas Clinic sees patients two evenings a week (new patients are limited to one evening a week). The on-staff nurse practitioner can attend to 12 patients in an evening. On evenings when a doctor can volunteer (about half the time) twice as many patients can be seen.
- 78% of healthcare costs come from preventable causes
- Roughly one half of the local hospital patients are uninsured or underinsured. Approximately 8/10 Emergency Room visits are by uninsured or underinsured individuals.
- In 2009 Lourdes served a total of 217,803 this number includes emergency room, inpatients, out patient procedures, Homecare visits and hospice visits.
- The group discussed the importance of access to healthcare for both adults and children and what that might look like for Paducah and McCracken County.

The Task Force is scheduled to meet next on Friday, December 10.

The goal of Impact Poverty is to develop a 10-Year Plan to reduce poverty in Paducah and McCracken County and break the cycle of generational poverty for its citizens. The United Way of Paducah-McCracken County is spearheading this effort.

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