

Issue Forum

Community Health: Taking the pulse

This forum examined how individual choices and behaviors increase risk factors and create local health issues. It explored how nutrition, physical activity and health information influence the wellness of Jacksonville's children and adults.

Key Findings:

- Jacksonville adults, as often as children, lack essential information about managing their individual health and are making unhealthy decisions. However, current health education efforts are targeted largely to children and youth.
- Of the many factors causing obesity to be a top health risk factor in Jacksonville, individual choice and lifestyle are playing increasingly significant roles, particularly among youth. Children are less physically active today than in the past, and opportunities to participate in physical education programs in schools are decreasing.
- In addition, external factors such as socioeconomic status and safe-living conditions are affecting opportunities for healthy individual choices in Jacksonville and are therefore contributing to overall community health issues, such as the rates of obesity, infant mortality, and sexually transmitted diseases.
- Current aggressive outreach and research efforts on sexually transmitted diseases in Jacksonville find an alarming STD rate. While more needs to be done, comparing Jacksonville statistics to other communities can be misleading, especially when problems may be hidden in other communities that have not conducted the same level of outreach and research.

Action Plan:

The committee will help to expand a Steps program (which provides pedometers and information to encourage workplace fitness) by introducing it to local companies with the help of the YMCA who partners with the Duval County Health Department and the Healthy Jacksonville initiative.

Committee members also pledged to get involved by focusing their volunteer efforts on various health issues and encouraging others to volunteer as well, such as by helping with National HIV Testing Week, encouraging schools to enhance their health and physical education programs, and helping to raise public awareness by promoting increased focus in the media on behavioral and external factors of local health issues.

Resource Speakers:

Dr. Ana Alvarez, Program Director, Rainbow Center
Lori Bilello, Health Planning Council of NE Florida
Carol Brady, Northeast Florida Healthy Start
Dr. Tom Chiu, University of Florida, Dept. of Pediatrics
Dr. Don George, Childhood Obesity Coalition (Duval)
Dr. Jeff Goldhagen, Duval County Health Department

Twanna Gould, DCHD WIC & Nutrition Program
Debi Lander, Healthwise
Dan Merkan, Program Director, JASMYN
Bill Rollo, Director, Northeast Florida Aids Network
Chip Seaman, STD Program Manager, DCHD

Number of participants: 38