

EARNING EXTRA CREDIT

Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center Extends Its Mission through Partnerships with Schools

BY HEIDI READ

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As proof it has done its homework, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center in Boise, ID, is receiving good grades for a partnership with five local Catholic schools designed to meet students' health and spiritual needs. The School Health Program reaches more than 1,700 students at Bishop Kelly High School and four elementary schools.

Program coordinator Kathleen Hunthausen, school nurse MaryLou Cunningham—both registered nurses—and program assistant Pat Miller are liaisons between students and faculty and the medical center's health resources. Last year they handled more than 5,100 student visits and approximately 1,800 phone calls from parents. They have held nearly 7,000 screenings for vision, hearing, dental, and other health problems.

School nurses maintain immunization and health records, develop school medication policy, promote wellness for staff and students, teach

CPR and first aid, report communicable diseases, and help students and families manage chronic illness. They work on teams with counselors, teachers, educational specialists, and administrators to solve students' problems.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The School Health Program began as a pilot project in

1994, serving the 648 students at the high school. With some grant assistance, the program expanded the next year to the elementary schools with the addition of Cunningham as the elementary school nurse.

In 1996-97, the School Health Program and Saint Alphonsus Ambulatory Rehabilitation Services (STAARS) secured a grant to add rehabilitation and disability education, including in-service education for school staff in speech and language development, and attention deficit disorders. The grant also covered speech and language screenings and referrals for kindergartners through third-graders. Students learned about different disabilities and what it was like to live with them. They were also taught how safety measures such as wearing seat belts and bicycling with helmets can help them avoid injuries that may cause disabilities.

GROWTH AND EXPANSION

School health services grew further in the 1997-98 year:

- STAARS and the School Health Program provided more speech and language in-service training for teachers. Speech and language therapists worked more directly with students and families. Physical therapists served as athletic trainers and led in-service training about athletic injuries for coaches and student trainers. Physical therapy services were given to students when appropriate.

- The Saint Alphonsus Auxiliary provided a grant for the School Health Program to develop a peer program to provide training and resources to students helping their peers.

- The School Health Program and the hospital's pulmonary rehab department—with help from a medical supply company and a university nursing department—developed an asthma pro-



Registered nurse Kathleen Hunthausen, coordinator of Saint Alphonsus's School Health Program, brings health education to youths in five Catholic schools in Idaho.

An asthma program helps asthmatic students and their families.

gram for an estimated 75 asthmatic students and their families.

- The School Health Program's nurses worked with school administrators and health teachers to organize a standardized health education curriculum for the five schools.

- Kids on the Block, a show using puppets, taught tolerance and support for diversity and disabilities. This community outreach was presented about 10 times during the school year.

A SOLID PARTNERSHIP

"We can use the resources at Saint Alphonsus for the School Health Program. We have access to the library, computer experts, health promotion, pharmacists, and pediatric specialists, greatly expanding the health resources usually available to school personnel," Hunthausen said. Cunningham said the alliance allows them to design health programs that fit the specific needs of individual schools.

The program has made a positive difference in students' lives. A seventh-grader listened to Cunningham's lecture on CPR and the Heimlich maneuver. Two weeks later in a restaurant, she used her newfound knowledge to save a choking diner. Children asked their parents for bicycle helmets and safety belts after listening to a head-injury victim confined to a wheelchair. A diabetic student now has an individual health plan, so friends and teachers know how to help when needed. □

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

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report cards to help them sign up their children for Medicaid. Many families do not realize that while they are working and are not on welfare, their children may still be eligible for Medicaid coverage.

THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Autry said all of the outreach workers—the full-time staff and those who help out when needed—are fluent in Spanish, which helps to overcome one of the barriers in the enrollment process: The forms are printed only in English. The Illinois Department of Public Aid is working on a Spanish-language version and should be publishing it soon.

In another effort to break the language barrier, Saint Anthony has produced public service announcements to air on Spanish-speaking radio stations. The PSAs have been effective, and station managers have enthusiastically supported the drive.

Not every idea has worked. Saint Anthony tried to get the word out by distributing thousands of fliers at currency exchanges, where many parents cashed their paychecks. The fliers explained the enrollment process and urged people to call the hospital. Saint Anthony was disappointed with the low response, Autry said, but it underscored the need to deal with people directly rather than waiting for them to contact the hospital.

GROWING THE ALLIANCE

Children's Health Matters is currently carried out in the District of Columbia and 21 states where the two systems operate health ministries. System leaders are hopeful other not-for-profit systems will become part of their alliance.

—Michael W. Leathers

 For more details on Saint Anthony's program, call Randy Autry at 773-521-1710, ext. 44835. For more information on Children's Health Matters, contact Patrick Cacchione, vice president of advocacy and communication at Carondelet Health System, at 314-770-0333 or the Children's Health Matters website at www.dcnhs-advocacy.org. See also the Health Policy column on page 12.

BOOKS

Pastoral Care Policies and Procedures for the 1990s

Now from CHA: a complete guide to pastoral care policies and procedures covering five essential components of pastoral care management: purpose, policies, sacramental policy, position descriptions, and performance appraisals.

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Copies of *Pastoral Care Policies and Procedures for the 1990s* are available from the CHA Order Processing Department for \$20 each.

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