





# 'Total Woman' Program Engages Members with Health

BY ANGELA HENDERSON-BENTLEY, M.A.

**A**ccording to the latest statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor, women make more than 80 percent of the medical decisions for themselves and their families. They also are more likely to be the caregivers when a family member falls ill. These statistics did not escape the leadership's notice at St. Mary's Medical Center, the largest hospital in Huntington, W. Va. St. Mary's is a 393-bed facility with advanced specialty services in cardiac care, cancer, emergency/trauma services, neuroscience and joint replacement. It serves the tri-state area of Huntington, Ashland, Ky. and Ironton, Ohio.

Realizing that women who are busy caring for others often neglect their own health, St. Mary's decided to devote more time and effort to reaching out to women in the tri-state area the hospital serves.

In addition to the three core cities, the hospital draws patients from numerous tri-state rural areas. The region's median household income, according to 2011 Census figures, was \$36,894, and statistics from the Centers for Disease Control show the area ranks high in several risk factors for heart disease, cancer or stroke. These include obesity, high blood pressure and smoking.

The first step was to hire Lisa Hastings, RN, M.H.A., a longtime obstetrics nurse at the medical center, as St. Mary's women's health coordinator. Hastings began her work Aug. 29, 2011. "Every mom probably has somebody calling them saying, 'I don't feel good. I need this or that.' And they're the

ones who make the whole, entire family's medical decisions," she said. "We wanted to be able to educate them to make informed decisions about their own health and the health of their family. We felt that if we could get the information to women, they could draw in everyone else with them."

For Hastings, the plan to better educate tri-state women not only involved coordinating women's health services, but also overseeing a new program specifically designed to equip women with the health information and resources they need. When Hastings and the St. Mary's marketing department started looking at what hospitals across the country were doing, they discovered Spirit of Women, a women's health marketing company based in Boca Raton, Fla. Spirit supports a network of hospitals and health care providers in over 100 non-competing markets with marketing materials, health information pamphlets/brochures and

other resources for women's health programs.

"Spirit of Women was already doing what we wanted to do," Hastings said. "So it just made sense to partner with them."

Plus, not having to create a program from scratch would allow St. Mary's to launch the program and bring these important resources to the women of the Tri-State that much faster.

In preparation for the program's 2012 launch, Hastings received Spirit of Woman training and worked with some of Spirit's other participating hospitals. "One of the great things about being a member of a network is that you can share ideas and talk about what works and what doesn't," Hastings said.

To create its own brand identity, St. Mary's named its new program The Total Woman, "because the program covers all aspects of women's health," Hastings said. "That includes nutrition, mental health, bones, breasts, stroke, cancer and orthopedics. It's every aspect of being healthy and staying healthy."

The Total Woman officially launched in May 2012 as a membership program. The lifetime membership fee

of \$25 was waived during initial startup. Women who join receive a membership card, a tote bag and a subscription to *The Total Woman* magazine, which combines both Total Woman and Spirit of Women articles. Members also receive health information, invitations to special events and personal assistance from Hastings with their health care needs.

The program's goal is to connect area women with services at St. Mary's. To help make that happen, Total Woman advocates were designated all across the medical center.

"The advocates are my go-to people when members need help," Hastings said. "They also help plan events and they share ideas. They believe in The Total Woman and feel it's an excellent program."

For example, if a Total Woman member calls Hastings for assistance scheduling a mammogram, Hastings can contact the advocate in the St. Mary's Breast Center and connect the member with the services she needs. The same is true

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for departments throughout the medical center, which helps members better navigate what can sometimes be an intimidating process.

"Now, it's almost like they've got someone holding their hand to guide them," Hastings said. "And with women having so many demands on their already busy schedules, that can be a very big help."

Jamilyn Hamlin, A.T.C., employee/community wellness coordinator at St. Mary's, is a Total Woman advocate and has been heavily involved in the program from the beginning.

"The Total Woman is a one-stop shop for everything in the women's health realm," Hamlin said. "In today's world, convenience really matters, and that is just what The Total Woman provides, with a central starting point to all the great health care resources St. Mary's has to offer for women and the people they love."

The Total Woman launched with a special party, a hugely successful kickoff with over 500 women attending. The event provided health

information, free health screenings and demonstrations of several wellness activities offered by St. Mary's, including Zumba exercise classes and tai chi.

"Women were so glad to be able to come together," Hastings said. "They were able to meet each other and talk, and get health screenings and talk to some of our advocates about their health concerns."

"There is a need for women to gain the knowledge they need to keep their families healthy, and they're looking for that opportunity to get together. They want to have fun but learn at the same time."

The Total Woman also hosted an extremely successful "Girls' Night Out" event in the fall. This time, holiday shopping accompanied the information, fellowship and fun. Among the vendors at the event were several women with their own home-based retail businesses selling homemade soap, arts and crafts, jewelry and cosmetics. "Girls' Night Out" also included a visit from Tanya Abreu, Spirit of Women's president and national program director, who spoke about how to be "dazzling" in life. She also offered tips on how women can be more emotionally healthy.

The Total Woman has been in existence for just over a year and counts more than 3,800 members — the youngest is 8 years old, and there are three members who are 100. "It truly is a program for women of all ages," Hastings said. "It's not unusual to see three and even four generations of women attending one of our events."

Hastings has attended dozens of public and corporate health fairs to spread the word about The Total Woman and to help connect women with the services they need. She also has visited numerous high schools and health departments, as well as several women's expos and St. Mary's events. The Total Woman has partnered with a number of other health organizations for events, including Power of the Purse, a women's leadership organization associated with the local United Way chapter; the American Heart Association; and PATH to the Cure, an organization that raises money for health initiatives in the Huntington, W. Va., community.

"Because women can't always drop everything and come to you, it's important that we take the program to them wherever they are," Hastings said.

In another important aspect of the program, The Total Woman partners with businesses that



will offer special discounts or incentives to Total Woman members. Currently there are 22 business partners in retail, fitness, food, home-based retail and health and beauty. Hastings said that not only did everyone she asked say yes to being a partner, businesses are now approaching her.

“St. Mary’s has a very positive reputation in the Tri-State,” Hastings said. “People want to be associated with us. And with such a large membership

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base, it’s a good way for businesses to get their name out there. Plus, these businesses want to see a healthier Tri-State as well. And they understand the importance of women in making that happen.”

To celebrate its first anniversary, The Total Woman hosted an afternoon tea. St. Mary’s Regional Stroke Center provided the educational component with free stroke risk assessments and other stroke-related information. The fun and fellowship centered around a photo booth where members dressed in tiaras and feather boas and stepped in for a special memento of the occasion.

“Sometimes the healthiest thing a woman can do is just take the time to laugh,” Hastings said. “And there was a lot of laughter going on in that photo booth. It was great to see and hear.”

There was even more laughter thanks to the tea’s special guest, Kathleen Passanisi, a motivational speaker who presented an entertaining program about emotional health.

“Balance is so important in a woman’s life,” Hastings said. “So we try to bring that same balance to The Total Woman. We want our members to receive the important health information we have to offer them, but we also want them to leave our events with smiles on their faces and feeling a little bit better about their personal situations.”

During The Total Woman’s second year, Hastings plans to spend a lot of time working with preteens and teenagers to increase membership among that age group. “It’s a good way to get them started young and thinking of being healthy, and staying healthy and respecting themselves and their bodies,” she said.

She also is planning several events to not only

distribute information, but also to give back to the community by sponsoring programs that have a direct impact on improving health in the community. Those include Girls on the Run, a program designed to get preteen girls and teen girls more physically active; and Lily’s Place, a center dedicated to helping drug-addicted babies and their mothers on the path to a better life. Plus, Hastings is looking for even more ways the members can have fun.

“After every event we do, people ask me when we’re going to have the next one,” she said. “They’re excited to be a part of it, and I’m excited for them to be a part of it.”

The Total Woman program began with a goal of signing up a thousand members in the first year. The program far exceeded that goal with 3,500 members in the first year and more than 500 showing up at the kick-off event. Members also turn out in large numbers to Total Woman screening events.

Hastings believes the key to the program’s membership growth was beginning with a large media campaign and then keeping members engaged each month with information and events that help them in their busy lives. Those members who don’t have email get direct mailings to their homes, and a quarterly magazine also keeps the program fresh in the minds of members.

In addition to trying to grow the membership even further, Hastings answers dozens of calls each day from The Total Woman participants asking for help connecting to St. Mary’s services. There’s the woman who was able to get relief from months of pain related to her cancer with the help of an advocate. There are the dozens of women Hastings has been able to set up with mammograms that they otherwise couldn’t afford. And there are the women who call just to have someone to talk to about their problems.

“It really is about personal connections,” Hastings said. “Connecting women to the people who can provide the evidence-based health information they need to make an informed decision, and connecting women with other women who are in the same situation. Sometimes we all just need someone to listen to us, and The Total Woman advocates and I are proud to have been that someone for a lot of people.”

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