

### Karen's Corner



February is American Heart Month, an opportune time to take steps to avoid the leading cause of death for men and women in the country – heart disease. This disease is often caused by high blood pressure, a condition that may show no signs or symptoms.

That's why the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Million Hearts campaign is encouraging everyone to know their blood pressure so they can make control their goal if necessary. Simply go to your doctor's office to get screened, or do it yourself at a drugstore or your own home with a blood pressure monitor.

The CDC offers these steps for controlling your blood pressure.

- Ask your health care provider what your blood pressure should be. Set a goal to lower your blood pressure with your health care provider and talk about how you can reach your goal. Work with your health care team to make sure you meet that goal. Track your blood pressure over time.
- Take your blood pressure medicine as directed. Set a timer on your phone to remember to take your medicine at the same time each day. If you are having trouble taking your medicines on time or paying for your medicines, or if you are having side effects, ask your health care provider for help.
- Quit smoking—and if you don't smoke, don't start. You can find tips and resources at CDC's Smoking and Tobacco website.
- Reduce sodium intake. Most Americans consume too much sodium, which can raise blood pressure. Read about ways to reduce your sodium and visit the Million Hearts Healthy Eating & Lifestyle Resource Center for heart-healthy, lower-sodium recipes, meal plans, and helpful articles.

It is also important to exercise daily. Little things like taking the stairs instead of the elevator and walking during your lunch break can be the key to a healthy lifestyle. The recommended thirty minutes of exercise can be easily obtained by breaking it up into 10 minute increments throughout the day.

West Virginia ranks poorly in America's health rankings with high cardiovascular disease prevalence, but we can change the statistics. Let's be examples for our families, friends and communities by making heart health a priority not only during February, but all year long.

### Sharpe Hospital's Literacy Program Teaches Patients Valuable Skills

According to a national study, West Virginia shows at least a 13 percent deficit in adult literacy, a statistic volunteers at William R. Sharpe, Jr. Hospital are working to change for the patients.

Volunteer Services Coordinator Krista Adkins is excited about the program's possibilities and understands it is vital to patients' health: "It is our hope that providing literacy volunteers will encourage patients to practice literacy skills, which will improve many aspects of their life, including their mental and physical well-being. Imagine how frustrating it would be to discuss your symptoms with a doctor and receive a medication, only to return home and not remember the verbal instructions or have the ability to read the label."

In addition to helping patients achieve a sense of self-sufficiency with their reading and writing skills, volunteers provide enrichment for patients, encouraging them to confront fears, hone skills and strive for more. Each literacy volunteer works with no more than two patients at a time to ensure quality interaction. *continues*



Alice Ferrell and Sam Hughes volunteer as literacy mentors at William R. Sharpe, Jr. Hospital.

## Sharpe Hospital's Literacy Program, *continued*

Retired teacher and certified literacy instructor Judy Seaman is one of the individuals working with the hospital's Volunteer Services Literacy Program. She has been helping staff understand how to assist individuals with literacy issues and will continue training new literacy mentors with future sessions open to the public.

"Our hospital strives to help each patient reach their full potential by first helping them meet their basic needs so they can begin to strive toward self-actualization. Patients impacted by illiteracy only know how to survive. Literacy volunteers devote time and help our patients obtain the skills necessary to live," said Krista. "Our patients are so grateful for everything that our volunteers do; however, they appreciate knowing that someone will donate their time. It is my hope that as volunteers encourage our patients to confront illiteracy, more patients will seek assistance."

To learn more about the program or to become a trained volunteer, contact [Krista.D.Adkins@wv.gov](mailto:Krista.D.Adkins@wv.gov).

## Health Command's Important Role During Winter Storm Jonas



*CTP Director Jerry Rhodes and team members Yolanda Sowards, Jim Sowards (behind computer screens), Humbert Zappia, Luke Mitchell and Donnie Haynes worked around the clock as part of Health Command's response to Winter Storm Jonas. (Not pictured: Carolyn Elswick, Dianna Gertz and Teri Surface.)*

DHHR's Health Command is activated when certain trigger points indicate that an Incident Command System (ICS) is needed to respond to an event that has the potential to harm the public's health or interrupt the vital services the Department provides to West Virginia residents.

In this way, Health Command augments the State Emergency Operations Center by acting as the health and medical component of Homeland Security. Often manned by DHHR's Center for Threat Preparedness (CTP) staff and other response partners who work in the Department, Health Command is the only entity in state government that supports both the public health and health care systems in the state.

Along with other state and local agencies, Health Command was activated and staffed around the clock during the response to Winter Storm Jonas. Health Command officially "stood up" or activated at 8:00 a.m. on Friday, January 22, and "stood down" Sunday, January 24, at 7:00 a.m. During this time, staff worked through five operational periods, knowing when they reported that day that the chances of a second shift arriving later for relief was unlikely due to impending impassable road conditions.

Due to the workload, those who reported worked long hours, rotating on cots for two-hour sleep shifts as needed. During that time, Health Command participated in National Weather Service and Homeland Security briefings twice a day, held regularly-scheduled calls with both Bureau for Public Health leadership and local health department representatives, monitored various response systems, weather maps, media outlets and social media accounts to gain situational awareness and a common operating picture for command staff and leadership, documented activities in situational reports, and much more.

Thankfully, the snow initially fell in a much dryer form than was first forecasted, and there was only limited damage and power outages. The biggest issue was road access, given the sheer volume of snow and the speed in which it fell.

"Once again, DHHR maintained many essential services during an emergency and helped maintain vital health and medical systems throughout the state," said CTP Director Jerry Rhodes. "I'm proud of the CTP staff and other DHHR employees and partners who went above and beyond to serve West Virginians through the storm."