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Community Foundation Grant Aids in Prevention of Birth Defects

Recently, Memorial Medical Center – Neillsville received a \$1,000 grant from the Marshfield Area Community Foundation. The purpose of the grant is to help provide prenatal vitamins, at no cost, to women of childbearing age. The initiative is led by Ken Weimer, MD, pediatrician.

Vitamin and mineral supplements are critical to the health of a mother and fetus, because they are rich in folic acid, calcium, and iron. Nutritional deficiencies, especially in the early stages of pregnancy, are directly linked to increased incidence of birth defects. The most well known correlation is the disabling condition of Spina Bifida, which is linked to a deficiency in folic acid.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists states that nearly half of all pregnancies are unplanned, and a 2009 Gallup Survey found that, as a result of the economy, women are delaying having their annual well-woman exam.

“Statistics like this reinforce the importance of physicians taking every opportunity to talk about the value of prenatal vitamins with female patients in their child-bearing years. We don’t necessarily know when our next opportunity will be, and if it will be in time,” comments Dr. Weimer.

Community Foundation Grant funds will be used to provide these vitamins to women before they become pregnant, in order to ensure optimal nutrition at the earliest stages of pregnancy -- the time when fetal development is most critical. Prenatal vitamins are recommended for women who are not currently trying to get pregnant, but who may want to conceive in the future.

“We are located in a federally-designated medically underserved area, which means access to care is more challenging for our community. So these grant dollars will expand the level of preventive care and decrease the likeliness of birth defects,” states Dr. Weimer.

Memorial Medical Center was able to purchase over 300 bottles with grant monies. Staff will monitor the success of this program by tracking the number of vitamins disbursed as well as birth defect statistics within Clark County.

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