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Good Samaritan awards Institute for Rural Health \$50,000

By CAROLINE EGGERS ceggers@bgdailynews.com Jul 18, 2018

Western Kentucky University's Institute for Rural Health received a \$50,000 grant from the Good Samaritan Foundation for its work in providing dental and clinical care to rural residents of southcentral Kentucky.

"If you look at the health data in the area, we have a shortage of medical and dental providers. There are unmet needs. Trying to meet those unmet needs out in the community is what leads us to our success," said Institute for Rural Health Director Matt Hunt, who authored the grant.

The grant, titled "Healthcare and Health Promotion in Underserved Areas of Kentucky Project," will be used to purchase dental and medical equipment, such as flu vaccines, A1C cartridges, which are the tools used to monitor glucose levels in diabetic patients, and the materials necessary for bone density and cholesterol screenings.

In addition, the grant will be applied toward visual learning materials for health prevention and education. For example, the dental clinic may show a child a picture of how much sugar is in a single Mountain Dew, or the medical clinic might show photographs of how cholesterol builds plaque in the body.

“It reinforces the education that we’re providing,” Hunt said.

Within the “promotion” aspect of the grant, teaching patients about healthy lifestyle choices and risk factors is an essential part of the program.

Institute students and staff frequently employ the stoplight method – screenings and test results are divided into green is good, yellow is caution, and red means trouble.

“Every patient receives one-on-one education based on their clinical results,” Hunt said.

And the learning is two-sided. Students participating in the program receive unique opportunities to get field experience.

“The really great part of this grant is that it allows students to take what they learn in the classroom and put it into practice,” Hunt said.

Since the institute’s opening in 2001, students in the program have logged more than 25,000 hours in patient care and education during an estimated 62,000 patient encounters.

Each week, the institute sends a traveling team of students, staff and licensed health professionals in two mobile units to the university’s 27-county service areas, which often lack appropriate physician-to-patient ratios and are sometimes located many miles away from city centers.

Last year, the institute provided nearly 7,800 services to more than 4,500 patients.

For many people, the institute’s services are a “safety net” of medical and dental care, according to Hunt.



“We give them a medical home that they can regularly go to,” Hunt said.

The most prominent issues treated include cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes, and “these problems aren’t going away,” Hunt said.

The current adult obesity rate is 34.2 percent, according to the State of Obesity, and Kentucky has the second-highest rate, 24.5 percent, of current cigarette use – a leading cause of cardiovascular disease – among adults, according the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Eventually, the program coordinators wish to expand services and increase the number of patients able to be seen.

The College of Health and Human Services provides an annual budget to the institute, but the institute is limited in its ability to provide services without the help of grants and individual donations – and its 120-plus partners for community organizations and nonprofits.

“We appreciate the support, it really makes it possible,” Hunt said.

The Good Samaritan Foundation has been one of those loyal partners for many years, now having doled out a handful or more grants since the program’s beginning.

"We've had a good relationship with Good Samaritan to continue care to these communities," Hunt said.