Meeting Focuses on Health Care Reform

On May 17th, the Healthy Start Coalition membership had the opportunity to hear from one of our state’s experts on Medicaid. R. Paul Duncan, PhD, University of Florida Research Foundation Professor and Chair of the Department of Health Services Research, Management and Policy, spoke about health care reform, the uninsured and access to care in Florida.

Dr. Duncan began by explaining how the United States has not done a very good job at balancing access, quality and costs of health care mainly because as a nation we depend on insurance to pay for our health care. There are nearly 50 million people uninsured and 20+ million who have what Dr. Duncan refers to as “crummy insurance.” In addition, Americans with coverage are rarely pleased with the insurance they do have.

In Florida, there are close to 4 million people and about 755,000 children who are uninsured. According to the Florida Health Insurance Study, the rates of uninsured vary widely within the state, however nationally, Florida ranks as the 3rd worst in rates of uninsured residents.

Dr. Duncan went on to discuss the vicious cycle caused by the high rates of uninsured people nationwide. With an increase in the number of people who are uninsured, there is an increase in uncompensated hospital care, which increases hospital costs and hospital prices.

These increases cause an increase in insurance prices and ultimately cause an increase in the number of uninsured. This is what Dr. Duncan’s colleagues have termed the “death spiral.” The key to health care reform is to figure out a way to break this cycle and the hope is that the Affordable Care Act is the solution.

Under the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid will be provided to qualifying individuals with incomes at or below 133% the Federal Poverty Level. Significant subsidies for private insurance will be available for families or individuals with incomes at or below 300% the Federal Poverty Level. The goal is to take close to 30 million uninsured and insure them through state Medicaid programs and/or state operated exchanges.

There are many other reforms written into the Affordable Care Act in order to provide better benefits. There is no doubt that all of these reforms will be costly, however the high costs will be supplanted by huge savings from the current system.

The ultimate hope is that the Affordable Care Act will cause a decrease in the uninsured population, which should result in reduced uncompensated care and savings for hospitals. These savings should result in lower hospital prices, which would mean lower insurance prices and eventually further reductions in the numbers of uninsured Americans.

Essentially the vision is that the Act could take the “death spiral” and turn it into a “life spiral.” Without the Affordable Care Act or any other action, Florida’s uninsured population could approach 6 million by 2015 and uncompensated care absorbed by Florida hospitals could approach 4.24 billion dollars, according to the Florida Health Insurance Study.
Summer is definitely upon us as indicated by the hot days and stormy afternoons. We always anticipate these months as if we were still a child on vacation from school relaxing and enjoying the lazy days of summer. At the Healthy Start Coalition, however, we are quickly reminded that our work never slows down or takes a vacation.

While we long for days that do not require vigilance toward the issues that result in newborns who end up in the NICU and infant mortality, we know that our work is truly just beginning and that our community desperately needs the education, support and hope that our services provide.

HEALTHY FAMILIES
It is with great relief we celebrate the news that Healthy Families remains whole this session after receiving massive financial cuts last year. With high rates of violence and increased stress levels, our county cannot afford to reduce services aimed at the prevention of child abuse. Evidence based and highly effective, we are proud of the consistent success rates this program achieves with its families. We consider the Healthy Families Program to be a shining example of strength based support for our community’s most vulnerable families. Quite simply, it works.

At the same time, we continue to intensify our services and programs aimed at helping our most vulnerable and fragile infants. In these trying times for parents, it is of utmost importance that we do not take our focus off of the increased risks which affect the health and well being of newborns.

SAFE BABY
With the development of our Safe Baby Curriculum, which addresses the three leading causes of preventable infant death in Hillsborough County, we are able to train front line professionals who are the first line of defense in improving infant mortality rates. Currently, all birthing hospitals county wide are receiving instruction on how to deliver this valuable information bedside to new parents.

Focusing on safe sleep, prevention of shaken baby syndrome and choosing a safe caregiver, the goal is to lower the incidence of infant death through education and a commitment by parents to make better decisions for their infants.

While developed as a hospital based education program, we are proud of the fact that we are also providing the Safe Baby training to Child Protection Investigators at the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s office, the nursing program at Hillsborough Community College, teachers, students and a variety of social service agencies by request. The demand for this valuable information gives us all the hope that with consistent messages to parents, our infant death rates as a result of these issues will decrease significantly over time.

IN THE NICU
Under development and equally as important is our pilot project located in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit at St. Joseph’s Women’s Hospital. Through a multidisciplinary specialized team of professionals, Healthy Start will be providing intensive support, education and care coordination to women who have had a poor birth outcome resulting in the NICU stay for her baby. Modeled after another one of our projects at Tampa General Hospital which was funded by March of Dimes, this approach will serve to intervene, improve the health of mom as well as baby and prevent subsequent poor birth outcomes. Again, using strength based approach; this model has a proven success with another vulnerable population.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS
Finally, an ongoing struggle for us at a local level continues to be the devastating effects of prescription drug addiction and pregnancy resulting in drug exposed newborns. We recently learned that Tampa is only second to Los Angeles in prescription drug abuse and, if the number of babies born drug exposed is any indication, this appears to be the case.

As early as 2006, our local hospitals were already seeing the impact of this horrible issue and brought it to the attention of the Coalition. Since then, we have been working diligently through our Zero Exposure Project to bring this issue to our community decision makers and leaders. Collaborating together at a local level, our hospitals, partners and county professionals formed the Drug Exposed Newborn Task Force which has worked tirelessly at forming solutions to address specifically the issue of drug exposed babies going home with drug using parents into questionable environments.

While we still have a long way to go on this issue, it has received support from a variety of organizations in our community including all area hospitals, social service agencies, the Hillsborough County Sherrif’s Office, the Office of the Attorney General, Hillsborough Kids, Inc., and several dependency court judges. With increased attention at the state level, Hillsborough County will soon prove to be a leader in the field of supporting drug exposed newborns to ensure their safety and well being.

Despite the challenges we face in our community, we also experience many successes on a daily basis one step at a time through our home visiting program, Mom Care and a variety of projects and initiatives that constantly reach physicians, providers, families and organizations serving children.

WE ARE HERE
It is with great pride that we announce our new slogan, “We Are Here,” which illustrates our commitment to the infants, children and families of Hillsborough County. We are grateful for all of our partners and funders including the Florida Department of Health, The Children’s Board of Hillsborough County, The March of Dimes, Allegany Franciscan Ministries, Inc. and the Ounce of Prevention Fund Florida.

As we move toward our 20 year anniversary date, I would like to personally thank all of those who work diligently towards the betterment of families in our community for without you...they would not be here!

Have a safe and happy summer!

Jane
Strengthening Families at the FSRCs
Through Male Involvement

The Family Support & Resource Center (FSRC) Community Café recently met to brainstorm ways to increase male involvement. Ideas for activities included organizing and holding several fun events such as a father and child building arts and craft, men’s health fair, technical classes and career day for dads. After planning meetings, the FSRCs initiated the following programs:

• “Calling all Fathers and Father Figures” Build with Me – Centers provided a model craft where children and their father and/or father figure worked together.

• Men’s Health Fair – To celebrate Father’s Day, the FSRCs and Healthy Start Coalition organized a health fair where men obtained cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and body mass index checks. Various agencies partnered such as St. Joseph’s Children’s Advocacy Center, Moffit Cancer Center and Suncoast Community Health Centers to provide resources and information. A total of 97 men were served.

• Movie with Dad – Fathers and children came together to enjoy a family movie, “Despicable Me” with popcorn and refreshments.

The FSRCs are also planning technical classes on various topics such as automotive, plumbing and floor installations. Please refer to the Center calendar for classes beginning in July.

In the spirit of universal access, the centers are working diligently to create opportunities for men to engage. To further our responsiveness to men we received additional feedback through a male involvement survey in which 45 men detailed when and what other activities they would participate in. The ultimate goal is for men to build social connections and become increasingly involved in their communities.
MomCare Hosts Semi-Annual Baby Shower

Last month, more than 70 mothers-to-be came together for a day to celebrate their pregnancies and learn the essentials of infant care, childbirth and breastfeeding.

On May 20th, MomCare hosted its semi-annual Baby Shower at the University Community Complex. Thanks to the generous sponsorship of Molina Healthcare, MomCare was able to offer soon to be parents the opportunity to learn from experts and gain access to valuable community resources.

MomCare is a program funded by the Florida Department of Health and the Agency for Health Care Administration that provides women seeking medical coverage for their pregnancy a simplified application process, which includes a one-page application and notification of eligibility within ten business days. MomCare clients receive guidance to select their prenatal care provider, assistance to schedule prenatal visits, and access to prenatal education and resources.

Expectant moms attended the mini-workshops on childbirth, Safe Baby practices, breastfeeding, and newborn care. They were also treated to hair cuts, hair styles and manicures by Manhattan Hair Styling Academy.

Many community organizations were present to offer education and resources. WIC provided nutrition education and information on their application process, the Hillsborough County Health Department offered education about lead poisoning, and FRANC (Fathers Resource and Networking Center) provided education to future dads. Staff from our Family Support & Resource Centers and the abcProgram of the Child Abuse Council also attended to reach families with helpful information.

Guests included MomCare clients, Healthy Start Program moms, and residents of Alpha House. All attendees participated in raffles and prize drawings throughout the day. The grand prize was a transportable pack and play crib that was won by a mom from Alpha House who gave birth to premature twins. She also received information about safe sleep for her infants.

MomCare promotes healthy pregnancies and aims to improve birth outcomes. For more information, call 813-233-2964.
ZEP Symposium Sheds Light on Prescription Drug Abuse

In response to more and more babies suffering from withdrawal symptoms linked to prescription pain pills, the Zero Exposure Project held a symposium for local medical professionals on April 9th. The day-long event included information on prevention, intervention and treatment for substance-exposed mothers and newborns.

Dixie Morgese, Executive Director of the Healthy Start Coalition of Flagler and Volusia Counties opened the symposium with an overview on addiction and how providers can screen and support women with addictions. With her experience as a licensed alcoholism and drug addiction counselor, she provided information on classes of drugs and the effects that they have on pregnant women, the developing fetus and the newborn baby. She discussed systems of care related to substance-exposed pregnant women and their babies and screening techniques for these women.

Dr. Jason Fields, University of Florida Addiction Medicine Fellow and Medical Services Manager with DACCO presented on the use of medication assisted treatment for opiate dependent pregnant women. He discussed common medical complications among pregnant women who abuse opiates, appropriate intervention and characteristics of infants born to these mothers. He also provided information about management with methadone and the possible future role of buprenorphine as a safer alternative to methadone treatment for babies.

During lunch, a panel presentation featured Judge Tracy Sheehan of the 13th Judicial Circuit, Jennifer Hock, Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Office, Sunny Hall, Hillsborough Kids Inc. and Bill Navas, Bureau Chief Children’s Legal Services, Florida Office of the Attorney General. The panel discussed how substance-exposed babies are handled by the child welfare system.

Thomas Brandon, PhD, Director of Tobacco Research and Intervention Program at the H. Lee Moffitt Cancer Center and Research Institute, discussed how to assist pregnant and postpartum patients to quit smoking. Dr. Jillian Glass, a local psychiatrist specializing in child and adolescent psychiatry, presented on the topic of treating perinatal mood disorders.

The final presentation of the day was about identifying and reporting child abuse. Lisa Colen, Director of Community Outreach at the Healthy Start Coalition co-presented with Keely Smith from St. Joseph’s Children’s Advocacy Center on four categories and indicators of child maltreatment. They summarized the process of Florida’s Abuse Registry and illustrated child protective services (CPS) investigations and outcomes.

Overall, the day provided a wonderful opportunity to examine substance abuse and the effects that it can have on pregnant women, the developing fetus and the newborn baby. The hope is that by sharing information, discussing issues and strategizing solutions, the community is better equipped to serve women and their babies.

Summer Safety

Here are tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics to keep your family safe this summer.

FUN IN THE SUN:
- Babies under six months of age should avoid sun exposure.
- All other children should cover up, by wearing a hat, sunglasses and cotton clothing with a tight weave.
- Stay in the shade whenever possible and limit sun exposure during between 10am and 4pm.
- Use a sunscreen with SPF 15 or greater that protects against UVA & UVB rays.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours, or after swimming or sweating.

HEAT STRESS DURING OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES:
- Reduce intensity of activities after 15 minutes when heat and humidity reach critical levels.
- Be well-hydrated before prolonged physical activity, you should
- Have water available and drink every 20 minutes while exercising in the heat.
- Clothing should be light-colored and lightweight.
- Seek cooler environments if you feel excessively hot or fatigued.

WATER SAFETY:
- Never swim alone. Even good swimmers need buddies!
- Always watch children whenever they are in or near the water.
- An adult should be within arm’s length whenever infants or toddlers are in or around water.
- Keep rescue equipment and a telephone near the pool in case of an emergency.
- Never dive into water unless you know the depth of the water and have checked for underwater objects.

BOATING SAFETY:
- Children should wear life jackets at all times when on boats or near bodies of water.
- Make sure the life jacket is the right size for your child.
- Blow-up water rings, toys, rafts and air mattresses should not be used as life jackets.
- Avoid boating when under the influence of alcohol, drugs and some prescription medications.
Recent news has illuminated an emerging trend stemming from our nation’s prescription drug epidemic. Babies are being born addicted to painkillers.

The New York Times recently reported on the increase in the number of women abusing painkillers while pregnant and the number of newborns treated for opiate withdrawal. There are no national stats that document the extent of the problem, but hospitals in states, including Florida, reported increases.

Over the past five years, the Healthy Start Coalition has been coordinating a working committee committed to addressing the issues of substance exposed newborns. The committee includes hospital staff, social service providers and community members concerned about pregnant women and babies affected by the prescription drug epidemic and other addictions. Since the Substance Exposed Newborn Task Force’s inception, Brandon Regional, St. Joseph’s Women’s, Tampa General and University Community hospitals have been collecting local data about substance exposed babies born in Hillsborough County. While the data collected is not official, it can give us a glimpse of the local trends.

Governor Rick Scott recently signed a bill into law aimed at controlling the state’s prescription drug epidemic by penalizing doctors who overprescribe painkillers, tightening rules for pharmacies and authorizing a prescription-drug monitoring database. Attorney General Pam Bondi says she also wants to develop an education campaign on the dangers of prescription drug abuse for developing babies.

She says, “The numbers are hard to find. We know the numbers are increasing but we need the specifics. We need this to bring about as much awareness to the community as possible.”

A May article in the Miami Herald provided some local numbers from the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration. Nearly 1100 babies born in Florida were treated for withdrawal syndrome in 2010, which is four times the number five years ago. In addition, the number of mothers treated for pregnancy complications related to drug dependence almost doubled during the same five year period. While these state records do not show which narcotics the mother was abusing, health care professionals say the cases are increasingly related to prescription drug abuse.

Most health care providers compare this trend to trying to care for the cocaine-exposed babies in the 1980s. Little is known about the short- or long-term effects of these drugs on a fetus and there is much debate on the best approach to deal with both a prescription drug addicted mother and the baby once he or she is born. Experts also say that it is difficult to decipher the effects of each substance because many drug users also smoke and abuse alcohol.
HUG Supports March of Dimes

Healthy Start Coalition’s HUG NICU team members brought friends and family to show their support for the March of Dimes. The team raised over $700 for the cause. In the last year, the HUG Program has screened over 1,600 NICU infants born or transferred to the four NICU hospitals in the Tampa area. They have provided education and support to help these families in the transition from NICU to home.

In an average week in Florida:

- 633 babies are born preterm
- 104 babies are born very preterm
- 1,710 babies are born by cesarean section
- 33 babies die before their first birthday

Source: 2007 NCHS via www.marchofdimes.com/peristats

Grant Awarded for Safe Baby

The March of Dimes has awarded our Family Support & Resource Centers with a Community Grant to conduct ongoing Safe Baby classes for families at the Centers. Classes will be offered to teach caregivers and parents about how to protect babies from the leading causes of preventable infant death. In Florida, more babies are dying from sleep-related issues than any other cause of death. Co-sleeping, suffocation, overlay and SIDS are critical components of the Safe Baby curriculum to prevent these tragedies.

Safe Baby curriculum components continue to be trained in hospitals throughout the county. Community Liaison Julie Williamson and Outreach Manager Jessica Reynolds also recently trained staff at TGH’s Pediatric Clinic at Healthpark.

The nursing program at Hillsborough Community College will also begin educating students using the Safe Baby curriculum. Six nursing professors attended a training at the Coalition to incorporate the information in the popular nursing program at HCC.

“We continue to reach for innovative avenues to deliver Safe Baby education. We are pleased that key organizations, as well as new funders, are helping us protect our infants,” said Lisa Colen.