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HealthyTown goes to Flint on preventive care mission

HEALTH CARE



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Health care



HealthyTown Everywhere was founded by Dr. Paul Ehrmann of the Family Health Care Center in Royal Oak.

Its goals are to reduce obesity and the 20 chronic diseases associated with it, especially diabetes and heart disease

Events have been held in Royal Oak and Detroit, with future stopovers coming to Freeland and possibly Grand Rapids and Muskegon

HealthyTown's Dr. Paul Ehrmann is looking for "champions" to bring the preventive care program to more towns.



Paul Ehrmann, D.O.

One big message that Ehrmann, a family physician for 40 years who is medical director at Family Health Care Center in Royal Oak, is sending out is that parents and health care providers should pay attention more to the continuing obesity epidemic that is illustrated by the fact there are more than 145,000 adolescents in Michigan with pre-diabetes symptoms.

Ehrmann, who people call **Dr. Paul**, also is concerned that 35 percent of adults are obese, the same percentage as 20 years ago, and that obesity can lead to at least 20 chronic health conditions, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and some forms of cancer.

"Nutrition is a great place to start. If we can teach people how to eat right ... that really puts them in a very good position to stay healthy and encourages them to move on to other healthy activities and behavior," said Ehrmann, a Crain's Health Care Hero in **2008**.

HealthyTown, which Ehrmann founded in 2014 as a community-based health and wellness initiative, teaches people to optimize health by working toward achieving healthy weight by improving nutrition, exercise, and lifestyle behavior education in individuals, families and communities.

Last month, Ehrmann was in Flint with 15 volunteer medical students, five attending physicians, 10 dietitian students and five registered dietitians.

The HealthyTown team saw about 35 children and adults for a variety of health issues, including high blood pressure, diabetes, overweight and obesity programs.

"We returned patients to primary care or made sure they had follow-up somewhere if they did not have their primary care physician," Ehrmann said.

The students and doctors came from five different universities and health systems, including Ascension Health's Genesys, Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Central Michigan University, Oakland University and William Beaumont Hospital School of Medicine and Wayne State University.

Nicole LeClair, a third-year medical student from Michigan State University's College of Osteopathic Medicine, said she participated in HealthyTown Everywhere because it is a way she can give back to her community. She plans to return to the Flint area when she completes her physician training.

"I was born and raised in Flint. There are not enough doctors here. I decided to stay to help the people in my community," LeClair said.

Ehrmann said he wants to sustain HealthyTown using more medical and health professional students, who can get extra training working in community settings with practicing providers.

Next community on the agenda for HealthyTown is Freeland, a small town near Saginaw, on Oct 13. Possible future destinations are Grand Rapids and Muskegon. The team has held several events in Royal Oak and Detroit to test the concept.

"We want to get into underserved communities" and also have "had contacts from other community outreach health system groups on partnering," Ehrmann said.

Business groups also have a stake in efforts to reduce obesity. The estimated annual medical cost of obesity in the U.S. is more than \$150 billion with the average medical costs for people who are obese were \$1,429 higher than those of normal weight.

HealthyTown events include sponsorships and partnerships with grocery stores, universities and other health organizations, including the Michigan Health Council, the Family Health Care Center, the Wayne State Coordinated Dietetics Program at Wayne State University, the Michigan State University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Holiday Market, the Oakland County Health Department, the Royal Oak Chamber of Commerce and the Royal Oak School District.

In Flint, Hamady Complete Food Store, which offers fresh fruit, vegetables and other whole foods, co-sponsored the event.

"We recognize we need to sustain the message in order to have improved outcomes," he says. "Our efforts serve as a start toward that effort building strong inter professional cooperative health teams on the way, delivering the best value to the people that we serve."

Inline Play

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