

GRANT TO IMPROVE WOMEN'S HEALTH

A&M to fund exams, pap smears, vaccinations

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The Battalion

Brazos County has some of the highest incidents and mortality rates associated with breast and cervical cancer in Texas, said Dr. Jane Bolin, a professor in the Texas A&M School of Rural Public Health.

In an effort to reduce both of these rates, the Texas A&M Health Science Center received a three-year, \$1.5 million grant from the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas on Nov. 22 to fund women's cancer prevention efforts in the Brazos Valley community.

Dr. David McClellan, principal investigator on the project and assistant professor of family and community medicine with the TAMHSC College of Medicine, said in a press release that the grant will directly impact the health of local women.

"The grant will address a critical unmet need for breast and cervical cancer screening and prevention activities in the Brazos Valley," McClellan said. "Ultimately, we hope to increase the number of low-income, underserved Texas women who receive clinical breast exams, pap smears and HPV vaccines."

The grant money will be put toward funding cancer screenings for women with no health insurance or with a history of high copays. The A&M Health Science Center will be able to provide women in the local community with inexpensive healthcare and refer women to secondary clinics if follow-up treatment is needed.

"These women don't go in for normal check-ups," said Bolin, co-principal investigator for the grant. "With the grant, [uninsured] women can have the same amount of care as those of us with insurance. One example is that more women will be able to get pap smears. Catching cancer early is going to be a lot cheaper than treating it when the woman is actually sick."

Bolin said the grant will also help fund vaccinations in the community to protect women from HPV, a disease that has been found to cause several types of cervical cancer.

"The grant will pay for up to 1,000 women to have the HPV vaccine," Bolin said. "This is significant because expo-

sure to HPV can remain silent in regular screenings. People can prevent HPV in the coming generations."

Chinedum Ojinnaka, graduate research assistant at the Southwest Rural Health Research Center through the School of Rural Public Health, said the grant money will benefit A&M's community.

"Through this grant, Texas A&M will positively impact the lives of the underserved women who will have an opportunity to receive free [or] subsidized screenings, which may result in early detection and removal of precancerous lesions," Ojinnaka said. "Thus, Texas A&M could potentially positively impact breast and cervical cancer mortality rates in our community."

Along with assisting and educating the community, the grant will also affect the education of students in the School of Public Rural Health at Texas A&M. Ojinnaka said the grant will give nursing students the opportunity to participate in breast and cervical cancer simulations for the three years that A&M is funded by the grant.

Ojinnaka said the simulations will provide hands-on experience that will prepare students for medical careers.

"Through this grant, Texas A&M will provide multidisciplinary patient management opportunities to nursing students and resident physicians," Ojinnaka said. "Studies have shown that multidisciplinary team management improves patient outcomes. Therefore, through this grant, Texas A&M is training students in valuable skills that will benefit the patients that will be cared for by these students in the future. This could serve as a model for multidisciplinary training at other medical and nursing schools."

Bolin said the Health Science Center is working to inform the community of the health opportunities the center is offering.

"We are handing out coupons and letting people know what the Health Science Center is offering," Bolin said. "The key is earning the community's trust and we have workers who are bilingual who are willing to work in churches to help spread awareness."

Bolin said the Health Science Center is also working with local organizations that serve the uninsured by offering reimbursement for their services, such as pathology, ultrasound and radiology.

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