



Main Story / 03.24.08

## Cayuga Community Health Network Stages Lunch – and – Learn Series at Unity House



Ann McCarthy (L), Michelle Dart (R)

**AUBURN** – The Cayuga Community Health Network, in collaboration with the Cayuga County chapter of the Central New York Diabetes Prevention Partnership, the county’s Tobacco Free and Healthy Men and Women Partnerships, and the county’s Cornell University Cooperative Extension, initiated a four-part, four-week ‘Lunch-and-Learn’ series at Unity House of Cayuga County Inc. on March 19, 2008 at the agency’s administrative conference room.

The four, one-hour sessions of the series, aimed at educating and informing organizations’ employees about healthy living via increased awareness of healthier choices, feature free healthy lunches to employee participants.

Entitled ‘Diabetes Prevention’ and held from noon to 1 p.m., the first session on March 19 attracted a capacity audience of 18 Unity House employees from all four of the agency’s primary services and programs as well as staff from various support departments. The remaining three sessions are scheduled to be held at the agency on March 26, April 2, and April 9, respectively.

Cayuga County Health Network representative Ann McCarthy told the attendees that it’s no longer a secret that there is a huge rise in diabetes onset in the nation’s general population. She said the purpose of the session was to inform and educate so as to help prevent any further increase in the incidence of diabetes as well as to provide resources to individuals and/or family members who may already be diagnosed with Type II diabetes.

“We’re also thrilled to be able to bring you what we know is a healthy lunch from Subway in Auburn,” she said to the attendees, in reference to the trays of whole wheat bread tuna and turkey sandwiches, fruit, and bottled water she brought to the session. “It’s to demonstrate that even at Subway, you can make decisions about and get healthy, nutritious food.”

Accompanying McCarthy and presenting on the diabetes prevention topic was Michelle Dart, PNP, CDE. The pediatric nurse practitioner and certified diabetes educator, who has spent the past seven years presenting on diabetes prevention and management primarily to Medicare and Medicaid populations, told her audience that the primary risk factor for onset of Type II diabetes was obesity.

“Nationwide today, two of every three American adults is technically obese,” she said. “In Cayuga County, and we’re not sure why, it’s estimated that just under 50% of the adults can be classified this way. We also know that one-half the people in N.Y. State have Type II diabetes now.”

Dart declared that about 75% of Type II diabetes, whereby one’s pancreas either cannot manufacture an adequate amount of insulin or one’s system is or becomes insulin-resistant, is

related to one's genetic components. Other important factors that one can change, she said, are diet and exercising.

"Type II diabetes occurs often without any manifestation of symptoms," she said. It proceeds slowly. One thing being encouraged is to screen for it earlier in life. The two most important things we can do to prevent the disease are eating healthy and exercising. They alone will really put a stop to the onset."

Dart and several Unity House employees attending the session discussed impediments to healthy eating and exercising, including a lack of time; the country's fast-food culture; poverty; living alone; being physically limited; and the development of the computerization of our lifestyles.

"We need to look hard at where we are at individually and make that commitment to changing if we need to," she said. "It's more than worth it, in the long run."