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Tobacco Awareness Program Finishes Unity House's 2008 Lunch-and-Learn Series



Cayuga Health Network's Suzanne Hai (L) and Ann McCarthy (R)

AUBURN – A Tobacco Awareness Program on tobacco addiction, secondhand smoke, and reasons to quit smoking presented by Cayuga County Tobacco-Free Coalition program coordinator Anne McCarthy and Cayuga Health Network's Suzanne Hai to 15 Unity House service, program, and support department employees from noon to 1 p.m. on April 9, 2008 at the agency's administrative conference room at 108 South Street in Auburn finished Unity House's spring 2008 Lunch-and-Learn series.

The four-part educational and informational series, held on four consecutive Wednesdays beginning March 19, 2008, featured sessions on diabetes prevention, learning to prepare and eat healthy foods, and starting and maintaining a low-cost exercise program, in addition to the April 10 tobacco cessation program. All four one-hour sessions were brought to Unity House employees by the Cayuga Community Health Network and is CNY Diabetes Prevention Partnership, Tobacco Free Coalition, Healthy Men and Women Partnership, and Cornell Cooperative Extension components.

McCarthy presented a myriad of facts and statistics related to the history of tobacco and cigarettes, their health effects, the ingredients of a cigarette, and secondhand smoke and its health effects. These included how smokers on average lose about 13-14 years of their lives due to smoking; how smoking is a major factor in lung cancer, emphysema, heart disease, and stroke; and how three primary myths about smoking ("that it's not really addictive, that it's not really dangerous, that it's worth the risks involved" – source: American Cancer Society) represent challenges organizations like hers are dedicated to overcoming to reduce the incidence of smoking and its known consequences.

McCarthy told the Unity House employees attending the session, a majority of them former smokers, that the rate of lung cancer incidence in Auburn was 15% above the state average rate. That above-average rate is associated in no small part to the results of a recent eight-county survey that showed Cayuga County harboring the greatest number of smokers, she said.

"We estimate that about 30% of Cayuga County residents smoke," she grimaced. "And of them, the majority is male between the ages of 18 and 34. Many people start because they are bored or because they are stressed out or anxious – we know this from surveying them. And we also know many quit or try to quit because their smoking created a health scare or warning or because they no longer want to endanger their spouses or offspring with secondhand smoke. The

good news about quitting is, there are consistent advances with aids that can and do greatly mitigate the multiple side effects of nicotine and other chemical withdrawal.”

McCarthy listed 13 primary ingredients of cigarettes that in and of themselves have been shown to cause health problems. When combined with a cigarette’s primary and reconstituted tobacco and ignited, she said, the effects can be addiction and short- and long-term health problems, including premature death.

Of interest to Unity House employees was a National Institute of Health statistic that declared that 45% of cigarettes currently purchased in the United States were bought by individuals with mental illnesses, and that 52% of those smokers also have an addiction to other drugs.

McCarthy finished her session with equally alarming statistics about how secondhand smoke causes at least 3,000 lung cancer deaths and 46,000 heart attacks annually, as well as an estimated 25,000 new child asthma cases a year attributed to mothers who smoke ten or more cigarettes a day.