

Each Day, Healthier Together | 2010 Report to Community

Women gather for an evening of inspiration, education

When she's doctoring a patient, Kristin Severson, DO, Hudson Physicians, often casts her eyes to the patient's caregiver – the wife, mother or daughter sitting nearby gathering information about her loved one. The internist worries that the caregiver isn't taking care of herself.

"We live in an affluent, educated, active community," Severson says. "But sometimes the women put themselves at the bottom. They are the caregivers for everybody else. Women are taking care of their parents, running to and from family activities, or getting their kids off to college. Then it dawns on them, 'I haven't taken care of myself.'"

Determined to inspire these busy women to take practical steps now to prevent future – often irreversible – heart disease, Severson and two physicians from Hudson Hospital & Clinics' Specialty Clinic made presentations last February at a free community seminar called "Close to My Heart – for Women." The event, hosted by the hospital, drew enough women to fill a conference room and a waiting list for a second seminar.

"Women have a sense that we are protected from heart disease completely, so we don't really start thinking about it until perhaps at menopause," cardiologist Karin Pandey says. "But this is not just a disease of men. It affects women equally and sometimes the results are much worse."

Pandey described several factors that make heart disease especially dangerous for women. For example, she said, half of women with heart disease don't get the classic "clogged" artery that ruptures and can be repaired. Instead, the plaque in the arteries can gradually erode and shed, "slowly choking her arteries to death."

Although the message was urgent, the physicians' presentations were punctuated by shared laughter and clear passion for their topics. They engaged the audience in a high-energy discussion about health. The results were satisfying for the audience and the presenters alike.

Practical suggestions infused with hopefulness

Even health conscious attendee Becky Christiansen came away from the evening with a renewed sense of

commitment to her own heart: "I fool myself sometimes that I'm getting enough exercise. I do a lot, like walking the dog, yard work and some manual labor like hauling brush. But, at the seminar, it hit me over the head. I need to do more things that get my heart rate going at an aerobic level to strengthen my heart."

She appreciated how the physicians focused on education and prevention, with an overriding message of hopefulness.

"It's a lifestyle change that takes diligence and dedication," she says. "But they make it achievable. They gave simple steps you can start doing."

That was an important aspect to physician Rynn Burke, an internist and trained chef who shared cooking tips and recipes while educating the audience.

"Nobody wants to put up with feeling bad or being punished," says Burke, RN and MD. "People will make positive and permanent changes if those changes feel good. It becomes self rewarding and much easier to maintain for life."

She emphasized that women need to be aggressive about heart health when they are young. But, at any age, even modest health improvements can make a big difference. For example, she suggested simple steps, such as adding two short walks a day, eating more vegetables and reducing salt. "You can make the changes gradually, but making them is very important," Burke says.

Community collaboration

In collaboration with Hudson Hospital & Clinics, Hudson Physicians, and Hudson Hospital Foundation, the seminar offered frank discussion, concrete facts and suggestions, and even free samples. Participants were treated to delicious, heart-healthy food, such as Mexican chocolate tofu pudding and vegetable soup. They also received canvas grocery bags full of healthy ingredients, courtesy of County Market in Hudson.

County Market's store director Dana Glade says customers are becoming more interested and better educated about healthy ingredients.

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Women gather for an evening of inspiration, education — continued

“We had customers comment after the seminar that it was just a wonderful event,” Glade says. “We received very, very positive feedback.”

An introduction to Tai Chi

Participants were introduced to Tai Chi and invited to attend a free class, offered at Hudson Hospital & Clinics. Emily Breuer, Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, teaches the class and enjoys helping students benefit from this exercise’s slow, thoughtful movements.

“It’s easy to learn for almost anybody. It can be done anywhere without any equipment and not much space,” Breuer says. The payoff for even 15 minutes of Tai Chi a day includes improved cardiovascular health, lower blood pressure, reduction of stress and anxiety and enhanced balance, to name a few.

“The Close to My Heart – for Women seminar was great. It was awesome we could offer something like that. I was honored to be asked to be part of it,” Breuer says.