NNB News: 2013 : 10 : 24 : MomCare: Breaking Down Barriers for Midtown Moms

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MOMCARE: BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS FOR MIDTOWN MOMS

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ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services almost 30 percent of America’s pregnant women do not receive first trimester prenatal care. Pinellas County is trying to reduce this number with a program called MomCare. The brochures for the program describe it as “health insurance for pregnant women” but MomCare community liaison, Cindy McNulty, would tell you it is much more than that.

“We are working to break down barriers for these women,” McNulty explains.

MomCare is a program that is sponsored by the Florida Department of Health and Florida’s Agency for Health Care Administration. It was created in 2001 to link pregnant women to various prenatal care resources. The program is geared toward low-income women, and once accepted into the program medical care and hospitalization during pregnancy is covered.

Application forms for MomCare are dispersed throughout the county and can be found in various places.

“I take them all over town!” McNulty declares, “I bring them to doctors’ offices, schools, and even faith based programs.”

Some of the places that these applications can be found include the Johnnie Ruth Clarke Health Center and Women’s Care Florida locations.

McNulty says that in order for women to be aware of the program, the applications need to be readily offered to them. She describes Midtown as a faith-based community and makes sure the applications are available in locations frequently visited by expectant mothers.

McNulty is quick to explain that MomCare is “no medical model” but that it takes the guess work away from pregnant women by providing resources including names of doctors who accept MomCare, child care providers, and informational courses.

MomCare Maternity Advisor, Maria Dacosta, explains how the program even provides post-pregnancy help.

“When the women are around seven months along we send them post-care information,” Dacosta says.

This information usually contains step-by-step instructions for getting your baby on Medicaid.

“Even moms who have healthy pregnancies get anxious once the baby is born,” Dacosta explains. “They want to get them covered by Medicaid quickly and we help them do that.”
McNulty is in charge of reaching out to women throughout the community and remembers one newspaper ad that really reached Midtown women.

"It was a young pregnant woman and across the top it read ‘pregnant with no insurance?’“ she explains. 
"We got a lot of phone calls from Midtown women looking for help."

She sees that families “step-up” to take care of their children and are actually “pretty savvy.”

"Many Midtown women are already receiving Medicaid, they are educated about the programs,” she says. “They just have to make the simple switch to MomCare when they find out they’re expecting.”

Although the program does make every effort to contact women who are eligible for MomCare, especially those with high-risk pregnancies, McNulty says that about 30 percent of the women do not respond to contact efforts and require a home-visit.

“Our program is based on mommy’s wanting our help,” McNulty declares.

Dacosta, an advisor, reaches out to Midtown women in need. She explains how although the women are usually happy to receive the help it is the time frame in which they receive it that really matters.

"Many women wait four to five months before receiving any type of pregnancy care or insurance," she says.

McNulty agrees and, as a former medical assistant and employee at the Johnnie Ruth Clarke Health Center in Midtown, has seen the problem first-hand.

"Many Midtown women have such a tight family-trusted support system,” McNulty explains.

She adds that although this is an amazing thing to have, medical support is also very important during early pregnancy. Through MomCare, McNulty urges women to receive prenatal care as soon as possible.

With both the support of tight-knit families as well as the resources provided by MomCare, pregnant Midtown women are able to fully dedicate themselves to keeping their baby healthy.

MomCare is prevalent in the Midtown community and is consistently trying to break down barriers for pregnant women by providing them with information on resources that will allow them to maintain a healthy pregnancy.

"Midtown girls are lucky," McNulty beams. “They have so much support and resources right in their backyards.”

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