

“No Heart Left Behind” teaches students how to be heart-health champions for mothers

INNOVATIVE PROGRAM EXPLOITS NATURAL FAMILY BOND

A new program involving Christiana Care’s Center for Heart & Vascular Health and area high school students exploits the bond between mothers and children to help keep mom’s heart healthy.

The “No Heart Left Behind” program, which encourages teens to help be healthy lifestyle advocates for their mothers, is based on a simple idea by cardiac surgeon Kathleen McNicholas, M.D.

Increasing awareness

“I think we can develop the natural link between mother and child to help prevent heart disease in women,” says Dr. McNicholas, associate chief of Cardiac Surgery. “There is a general lack of awareness about how cardiovascular disease impacts women and this

program tries to counter that by engaging teens as women’s heart health champions.

“As I see it, each student can exert a substantial impact on mother’s health by getting educated about related health issues, staying involved and serving as positive role models,” Dr. McNicholas says.

The program, launched Oct. 14 at a mother-and-student’s forum at Ursuline Academy, has the support of about 20 students from Ursuline Academy, Tower Hill, Salesianum, Sanford and, in Pennsylvania, Mount Saint Joseph Academy. But if her vision works out, Dr. McNicholas says, the “No Heart Left Behind” concept could become part of area high school culture and beyond when students graduate from high school and enter college and careers. “This is

The “No Heart Left Behind” program launched Oct. 14 at a student-mother forum held at Ursuline Academy.



an intergenerational linkage that shouldn't be severed at graduation," she says.

Empowering students

"For me, the program is important because my mom does so much for me and I just want to make sure I can do something for her in return, by helping her take care of herself," says Claire O'Neill, a student at Ursuline. "This plan provides me with a way to do that."

Christiana Care's Community Outcomes Department Brian M. Rahmer, MS, CHES, the department's Healthy Lifestyles Coordinator, works with the students and provides them with health education materials. Rahmer, who Dr. McNicholas says "connects easily with the students," is helping raise the teens' awareness about heart disease in woman and about preventive measures such as exercise, nutrition, stress reduction and social interaction. He says his objective is to teach them how to talk to their peers and mothers so that they can deliver an effective message.

A valuable resource

As a high-visibility advocate for women's health, Dr. McNicholas is known for publicly decrying prevailing ignorance about the impact of heart disease on women in the U.S.

MORE FACTS ABOUT WOMEN AND HEART DISEASE

Did you know?

- Cardiovascular disease kills about one woman a minute.
- Sixty-four percent of women who die suddenly of heart disease have no previous symptoms.
- More women than men will die within the first year after a heart attack.
- The rates of women who die from cardiovascular disease are much higher than those who die from breast cancer.

(Source: American Heart Association/Go Red For Women)

Armed with facts from personal experience (she has been an open-heart surgery patient herself), fortified with facts from the American Heart Association (AHA), she frequently fills rooms with women who want to know the truth about heart disease. Here are some of statistics and views she offers her audiences:

- Only a small fraction of women (13 percent) view heart disease as a potential health threat.
- Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is typically perceived as a man's disease, but AHA numbers show that CVD is the leading

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Annual Fieldstone golf event

More than 50 friends and supporters joined Nicholas Petrelli, M.D., (second from right), Bank of America endowed medical director of the Helen F. Graham Cancer Center, for the Fourth Annual golf event at Fieldstone Golf Club on Sept. 24. With Dr. Petrelli are (from left) his brother-in-law, Mike Hogan, Timothy Wozniak, M.D. and Yogish Patel, M.D. ●



Breast Center festival

The staff of the Christiana Care Breast Center surrounds Wendi Fox Pedicone, a patient who is the author of *Hanging Out With Lab Coats*, a memoir that chronicles her personal story about surviving advanced stage breast cancer diagnosed in 2004. From left: Joanne Antonio, RN, Darcy Burbage, RN, MSN, AOCN, Jossie Traynham, RT III, Pedicone, Kim Strickler, Meghan Shields, RT, and Lisa Plumley. ●

No Heart Left Behind, continued

cause of death in women over the age of 25 and it kills twice as many women in the U.S. than all types of cancer, including breast cancer.

The problem is worsened by the insidious nature of the disease: Studies show that women can have warning signs that exist weeks, months or years before they even have a heart attack. "Men typically experience the so-called 'classic' heart attack signs, which include tightness in the chest, arm pain, and shortness of breath," says Rahmer. "Women's symptoms—such as nausea and fatigue—are much more discreet and often written off as something not cardiac related. As a result, heart attacks can be more fatal for women."

Creating a legacy

Rahmer says one of the program's ultimate goals is to have the entire family adopt a healthy lifestyle. Another goal is to make the program an enduring one. "Dr. McNicholas wants to see this legacy carry on after the initial participants have left high school, graduated from college and moved on," he says.

"Young people represent a large source of energy that we have only begun to tap into," says Dr. McNicholas. "But it's the students' program to develop ... they're the ones who are going to show me how it will happen." ●