

Desert Diabetes Alert Program Early Detection and Intervention are Key



Screeners Ambra Labicanio, MA, (left) and Jasmin Hernandez, MA (right) gather information from Stanley Thurston, part-time Palm Desert resident. For the estimated 13 million Americans who know they suffer from diabetes, there are millions more that are unaware they even have the disease or are at high risk for the disease. Identifying and alerting Valley residents of a potential risk for diabetes, and intervening to help minimize that risk, is the goal of Eisenhower Medical Center's Desert Diabetes Alert Program.

Initiated in July of 2003 through a grant from the Desert Healthcare District, the Desert Diabetes Alert Program was initially designed to increase early detection and intervention and promote healthy behaviors for individuals most at risk for Type 2 diabetes — Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans and Pacific Islanders, ages 45 to 65. The program's first year goal was to screen 2,500 of these high-risk individuals for pre-diabetes, a precursor to the actual disease, marked by hypertension, excessive weight around the waist (waist measurement of more than 40 inches for men and more than 35 inches for women), low HDL ("good" cholesterol) levels and higher than normal (110 mg/dl or higher) fasting blood sugar. Blood sugar levels are higher than normal, but not high enough to be considered diabetes.

A diagnosis of pre-diabetes means that you are at greater risk of developing Type 2 diabetes soon or in the future, and of developing heart disease or having a stroke. A family history of diabetes is also a predictor of a potential diagnosis.

The program was so successful in meeting its first year goals that it was recently awarded additional funding from the Desert Healthcare District and has expanded its services to meet the needs of groups outside the high-risk categories. It is now working in the community to increase early detection and prevention for all adults, and with children, ages 10 to 18, in local schools. "...58 percent of those with prediabetes can avoid transitioning into diabetes."

"There's an awful lot of education to be done out there," says Barbara Adams, Program Coordinator for the Desert Diabetes Alert Program. "It appears that around 36 percent of the children we've screened are at risk of diabetes and are unaware that they're at risk." The statistics are similar for adults.

Education is a big part of what the program strives to achieve. Program staff recently began working with local schools to offer classes on diabetes in both English and Spanish. The program also offers pre-screening free of charge to the community. Screeners make their rounds to area stores, including Rite Aid, Ross Dress for Less, Mervyn's and McDonalds®, conducting blood pressure checks and questionnaires to determine the risk for diabetes. Adams says that with education and intervention (weight loss, exercise and lifestyle/diet changes), as many as 58 percent of those with pre-diabetes can avoid transitioning into diabetes.

In addition to Adams, the Desert Diabetes Alert Program staff consists of Margaret Corwin, Program Director; Carmen Murillow, Outreach Coordinator; Priscilla Blancarte, Program Secretary; Alma Gutierrez and Eve Smiley, Nurse Educators; and Screeners: Racheal Gonzales, Jasmin Hernandez, Lovely Hodge, Stephanie Jaramillo and Ambra Labicanio.

For screening times and locations, or to find out more about the Desert Diabetes Alert Program, please call 760-674-3688. To take a simple Risk Test for Diabetes or for more information on pre-diabetes, please visit the American Diabetes Association Web site: www.diabetes.org/pre-diabetes.