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Increasing health literacy

A recent partnership between a local and a state agency has goals of improving parent health literacy, helping reduce unnecessary emergency room visits and missed school and work time due to sick kids.

On Oct. 15, Prairie View's Health Home Care program received a shipment of the book "What To Do When Your Child Gets Sick." Written by registered nurses Gloria Mayer and Ann Kurklierus, the 180-page, photo-illustrated manual is intended to give parents a plan of action for most child health related situations they are likely to encounter.

The Kansas Head Start Association (KHSa) distributed more than 17,000 books to agencies like Prairie View, participating in the KHSa Parent Health Literacy Project.

KHSa research shows nearly half of the population has trouble with routine health information, while 45 percent of families participating in pilot projects in public health settings report emergency rooms as their primary source of care.

The project, along with the books' distribution, began in 2004 within Head Start.

Peggy Kelly, of KHSa, said they began reaching out to outside agencies making routine direct contact with parents and kids about five years ago. It is the first time Prairie View has partnered with the program.

Through the partnership, Prairie View's Rhonda Tammen and Amber King, with Prairie View's children's health home care, recently attended a training session with other health professionals to learn best implementation of the book to parents of children within the health home program.

"We would implement it with our clients who may not receive Head Start services, in fact who often don't," Tammen said.

After an instructional session with a health home agent, the book will be available free of charge to interested parents participating in the health home program. The book carries a suggested retail price of \$12.50.

"Research has shown just giving parents the book really has no effect," Kelly said. "When you give the book with the instruction we see dramatic outcomes."

Kelly said outcomes include 55-percent reductions in unnecessary ER visits, along with large decreases in missed work or school time.

“To do that you need to make sure kids are getting their vaccines and improving their overall health,” King said. “We’re also looking at reducing childhood truancy, helping parents better understand when kids need to stay home or when there is something else they can do.”

Tammen said the health home program is for folks who have Medicaid and a child with a diagnosis qualifying them as having severe mental illness. She said the beauty of what KHSA is doing means partners like Prairie View also have no cost at this time.

Kelly said funds are procured through a variety of sources, including Blue Cross Blue Shield of Kansas Foundation.

As a partner, Prairie View will send monthly reports to KHSA with the number of books distributed, whether presentations were made in groups or individually and when possible participating clients’ insurance information for future grant purposes.