Providing care to pregnant women

By Cindy Sunday Powell, Mona Parish and Mary Cortez

Access to adequate health care during pregnancy is about more than just prenatal vitamins and regular check-ups. Education also plays a pivotal role in the choices people make for themselves and their children.

Nonprofit pregnancy medical clinics across Texas believe that access to education about pregnancy and sexual health is vitally important. Trained professionals and peer counselors partner with women and men daily to provide essential services and information that are vital to each person’s health and wellness when and where they need them, before and during and after the baby is born. For example:

Thousands of women in the Houston area take advantage of each year of the free pregnancy testing offered by PACN (Pregnancy Assistance Center North) and other pregnancy resource centers like it. Biologically accurate information about pregnancy options — parasite, adoption and abortion — is available for women who are ambivalent about being pregnant and think they have nowhere else to turn for help. Many centers offer referral for physicians and even for adoption agencies at the client’s request, and they also have information about shelters and maternity homes for girls and women in need.

Ultrasound, one of the few medical services, allow a woman to hear the heartbeat and see the baby while a nurse walks her through the trial of development. Additionally, ultrasounds indicate the viability of a pregnancy, and the fetal age, which is critical information for a woman who is contemplating her options. PACN statistics indicate that 72 percent of clients seriously considering abortion decide to hold on to their children after an ultrasound.

During pregnancy, families help a woman and her partner cope effectively and safely with anger and use healthy communication skills. For many women and any victims of past physical or mental abuse, these courses can provide the foundation for functional, healthy relationships and decrease the likelihood of family violence. A report issued by the Texas Council of Family Violence found that in 160,167 family violence incidents occurred, and 111 women were killed. More than 70 percent of Texans say they have been a victim of domestic violence, or have a family member or friend who has been abused.

Specialized infant care classes help moms and dads know what to expect during the labor and delivery process — and how to care for the baby and themselves and their babies afterward. And many centers offer after-school enrichment programs where clients can learn about parenting techniques, child and adult health, child safety and the warning signs of postpartum depression. Some centers can assist each month with diapers, formula and baby food — and even with baby furniture items.

More than 4,300 pregnancy resource centers, including PACN, across the United States offer compassionate, client-centered care and provide information about pregnancy and sexual health that is medically accurate, relevant and unbiased. Because of centers like these, thousands of women are able to make unplanned pregnancies a thing of the past.

Outlook

Corrections

BY CINDY SUNDAY POWELL, MONA PARISH AND MARY CORTEZ

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MEDICINE

Providing care to pregnant women

Provided to the executive director of Pregnancy Assistance Center North Parish, Mona Parish is the executive director of Care Net Pregnancy Center of Northwest Houston and Cortezi is the executive director of Twinbell Pregnancy Center.

U.S. can weather a sharp jump in price of oil

Government can take steps to help consumers reduce their need for petroleum

By Joe Barnes and James Coan

Gasoline prices may be high, but they can still at a high. Instability is sweeping much of the Middle East and North Africa, home to some of the world’s largest oil exporters. Tensions between Iran and the West is at its highest point in years, heightening the risk of military conflict. Other impendences — ranging from another major oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico to political conflict in Nigeria — add further uncertainty to an already cloudy supply picture. How well is the United States prepared for an oil-price shock?

The answer is not very — at least in the short run. A sharp uptick in price might prompt the federal government to release supplies from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in an effort to boost supply and calm markets. But that is about it. Most of the adjustment will be left to the market, as more than one-third of driving is discretionary. There are no switchover devices in place. And that is a problem.

In the meantime, households will have less disposable income and face the increased uncertainty associated with sharply higher prices. Is there anything the government can do to help remedy this state of affairs? Absolutely. A variety of measures that help consumers reduce their demand for oil could “provide large reductions in oil use quickly and cheaply, while helping preserve mobility options,” according to the detailed report briefing Oil in a Hurry, published by the International Energy Agency (IEA). The IEA notes that countries must be well prepared before an emergency and shows that the U.S. plans and preparation lag behind most of the other 27 IEA nations.

One of the easiest options is a media campaign that focuses on steps drivers can take to reduce their oil use, such as properly inflating their tires and combining trips. The U.S. government has a great website with the information at fueleconomy.gov, but consumers have to find it themselves.

But even these tips can only go so far. A well-thought-out plan focusing on the community to work can yield some of the largest drops in gasoline demand. The three main options are quite straightforward: working from home, sharing rides and working fewer but longer days. These alternatives — known as telecommuting, ride-sharing and compressed work schedules, respectively — appeal to different segments of the working population. The IEA looked at each option and found each could reduce transportation oil use by at least 1 percent in the U.S. and Canada.

In helping workers to use these options during a crisis, the first step is to open a dialogue with employers. Employers may choose to allow their workers to telecommute or take remote jobs during an oil crisis. They may also sign workers up for remote jobs at the same pay with a guaranteed end to the penalty, sign up workers beforehand or make sure their business is prepared.

Ed Korean

Outlook

Coming Monday: Latinos can boost the environmental movement.
Our students need longer school day to be competitive

By Robert Sanborn

Economics and education are hope-lessly tangled. Given poverty brings many students to school hungry and in need of school-based meals and health care. So at the same time we are focusing our efforts on education, we are working to address the many issues that cause poverty. And the two are inextricably linked. It is important that we give students ample time to learn. In an age of flight and research non-profit organization Children at Risk looks at the schools that best serve our most at-risk students. We know that in order for students to learn, schools must be well managed and have adequate resources. The American school year as a cost-saving measure. How-ever, there are a number of examples of schools increasing instructional time without significantly increasing their costs. Some schools include high-po-tencial students in an extended learning time program that begins during the week. This month, for example, New Mexico's Governor Susana Martinez announced that she will sign a bill that will extend the hours of instruction in the state's public schools. This is a great move and well deserved. The new law will allow schools to tailor their educational programs to meet the needs of their students. It is important that we support these efforts, as they will help to improve student achievement. We must also remember that while increased instructional time is important, it is not the only factor that affects student success. Other factors, such as teacher quality and school resources, also play a significant role in determining student outcomes. It is important that we continue to invest in these areas, as they are critical to student success. The impact of longer school days on student performance and achievement is well documented. For example, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that students who attended schools with longer school days had higher rates of graduation and college attendance. These results are consistent with findings from other studies, which have shown that longer school days can lead to improved academic outcomes. In conclusion, we must support efforts to increase instructional time, as they will help to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. However, we must also remember that longer school days are not a panacea, and that we must also address other factors that contribute to student success. In summary, we must work together to support educational reform and ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Robert Sanborn is the president and CEO of Children at Risk and serves on the board of directors of the National School Da lengthening and other creative solutions to improve student outcomes. It is important that we continue to invest in these areas, as they are critical to student success. The impact of longer school days on student performance and achievement is well documented. For example, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that students who attended schools with longer school days had higher rates of graduation and college attendance. These results are consistent with findings from other studies, which have shown that longer school days can lead to improved academic outcomes. In conclusion, we must support efforts to increase instructional time, as they will help to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. However, we must also remember that longer school days are not a panacea, and that we must also address other factors that contribute to student success. In summary, we must work together to support educational reform and ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. Robert Sanborn is the president and CEO of Children at Risk and serves on the board of directors of the National School Da lengthening and other creative solutions to improve student outcomes.