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Study: Socioeconomic status affects health

By Liz Welter
Marshfield News-Herald

Highly educated people are more healthy, a study of the status of Wisconsin's 72 counties and its largest city has found.

The report issued today also compared the health of Wisconsin residents to the rest of the nation.

It found the state is about average and slowly declining in fostering a healthy population, according to the Health of Wisconsin Report Card compiled by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute.

The unique component of the study is that it measured the disparity of health in Wisconsin based on gender, geography, education and race/ethnicity, according to Dr. David Kindig, one of the authors.

A large disparity exists between college-educated and less educated people.

"Education is a proxy for socioeconomic status," Kindig said.

Children of mothers who are high school-educated or less have a mortality rate more than double that of babies of college-educated mothers. The mortality rates and number of sick days also are greater for less educated adults, according to the report.

"The fact that there is this variation in the economic groups" is an important component in devising future health programs and plans for the state, Kindig said.

"Numerous studies have shown the correlation between socioeconomic status and health," said Dan McCarty, research scientist at the Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation.

A component to addressing the disparity is education and access to preventive health care, McCarty said.

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Marshfield Clinic has regional medical centers in some of the underserved rural health care areas, said Greg Nycz, director for the Family Health Center of Marshfield Inc., a program partnered with the Marshfield Clinic.

Through the Family Health Center, the clinic is opening a dental facility in Chippewa Falls and breaking ground for a site in Park Falls. Plans are under way for a Marshfield dental clinic, Nycz said.

In the 2006 report comparing the 72 counties and city of Milwaukee, Wood County ranked first in health care and 17th in overall health. The components of the health care ranking included health insurance rates, underserved population, dental visits, diabetic care and biennial mammography rates.

Nitrates in drinking water is the largest health problem in the physical environment of Wood County, the report said.

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