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HEALTHWORKS
MAGAZINE

Emerson Hospital

Adding Life
to Years

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Looking for a few friendly greeters



EMERSON

ADVISOR

HealthWorks' editorial staff spoke with Acton Medical Associates pediatrician Jessica Rubinstein, MD, about the results of the 2006 Emerson Hospital Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

TRACKING OUR KIDS' BEHAVIOR

WHAT IS THE YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY?

It is a survey about health-related behavioral issues that is conducted among 8,200 students in grades six, eight and nine through twelve who attend schools in the Emerson Hospital service area. The hospital underwrites the cost of the survey, which is conducted every two years and is developed with input from health educators in seven school districts. Its results are made available to educators and administrators in all the school systems, as well as to parents through public meetings and various articles in the media. For several years, I have served on a panel of medical experts who discuss the survey findings at public gatherings in Acton. I also serve as the Acton-Boxborough school physician.

WHY IS THE SURVEY IMPORTANT?

It helps us understand the risks to which our children are vulnerable and lets us act—as educators, parents and concerned citizens—to try to modify risky behavior. And that appears to be having an impact. This latest survey shows a decline in smoking among teenagers in our region, for example, suggesting that emphasizing this behavior in health and wellness classes had an effect. Only 29 percent of area students reported that they've tried cigarettes, and only 14 percent reported they had recently smoked. This compares to state-wide rates of 51 percent and 21 percent.

WHAT SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS DID THE 2006 SURVEY REVEAL?

The number of area teenagers reporting that they have had sexual intercourse—28 percent in this survey—has remained constant over the years. However, approximately 36 percent reported having either given or received oral sex. National studies indicate that many young people don't consider oral sex to be as serious as intercourse; they regard it as an acceptable alternative. As a physician who treats adolescents who have contracted sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes through oral sex, I view this as an area of concern. We need to focus on this in health education programs.

WHAT ABOUT SUBSTANCE ABUSE AMONG AREA TEENAGERS?

Drug use has dropped from 27 percent to 17 percent in the years since the 2000 survey, suggesting that educational efforts have worked. Alcohol use has declined from 48 to 40 percent. Parent-permitted drinking—so-called “safe” drinking at parent-supervised parties—has dropped; publicity about law enforcement and lawsuits related to this has probably helped. But 17 percent of tenth-graders, 25 percent of eleventh-graders and 32 percent of twelfth-graders reported that they have been in cars with alcohol-impaired drivers. This is a troubling statistic.

DID THE 2006 SURVEY REVEAL ANY NEW TRENDS?

Questions about Internet activity were added to this year's survey. The results showed that 25 percent of area high school students gave personal information over the Internet to people they've never met, and 15 percent said they had met someone in person who they first met online. Any police officer will tell you these are dangerous behaviors that need to be addressed, both in the school curriculum and at home. This can be a challenge since kids often know more about using computers than their parents do. The fact is, parents need to learn how to monitor their children's Internet use and know what sites their kids are visiting on the computer.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS?

At a minimum, a computer should be located in a common area, not in a child's bedroom. And education needs to start during the elementary school years. These days, kids in the third and fourth grades are going online and, by the eighth grade, they are routinely doing research on the Internet. Also, parents should ask their children about Internet bullying. Many parents are unaware of the degree to which that behavior occurs.

For an informative resource book on how to identify risky behavior and talk with your teens about it, contact Emerson Hospital at 978-287-3085.

Emerson Volunteers Commit Time, Talent and Energy

Recruitment is under way for more hospital greeters



For more information on
volunteering at Emerson Hospital,
please call 978-287-3200.

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If you would prefer not to receive such mailings in the future, please let us know by calling 978-287-3085 or send an email to pr@emersonhosp.org.

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The information included here is intended to educate readers about health issues, but it is not a substitute for consultation with a personal physician.

The mission of Emerson Hospital is to deliver the highest quality, safest and most cost-efficient care to our patients and to maintain a professional and respectful environment for all members of the Emerson Hospital community.

A warm smile makes any situation better, says Betty Farfaras. As one of the first greeter volunteers at Emerson, she dispenses plenty of smiles, along with information and guidance, to hospital visitors. "When my husband told me that Emerson was looking for greeters, it kind of clicked," says Ms. Farfaras, a Woburn resident and former restaurant function director. "I enjoy helping people. Besides, we get our care at Emerson, so I know it's an absolutely wonderful community hospital."

"Our greeter volunteers are part of the hospital's Service Excellence Program," explains Sharon Knox, who directs Emerson's popular volunteer department. "As the first people that patients and visitors encounter, they must provide excellent customer service."

Greeter training begins in the transport department—the best way to get to know the hospital.

"Our transport department performed more than 85,000 jobs last year—not only moving patients, but transporting medical records, pharmacy items and lab specimens," says Ms. Knox. "Many volunteers say they love the exercise; they can cover three or four miles in a four-hour shift."

Doug Crumbey (shown above) puts in more shifts than most; the Acton resident works 1,000 hours per year, on average, as a reception volunteer and trainer. "My background is in sales and marketing, so I utilize my people skills," he says. "Whether you're behind a reception desk or doing the official greeting, being a volunteer requires diplomacy and resourcefulness."

More than 520 individuals donated 72,000 hours last year. "Our volunteers do meaningful work, and they contribute to Emerson in important ways," says Ms. Knox.