

## Blue Hill: Grant to help fight chronic illnesses

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BLUE HILL, Maine — An effort to develop a countywide approach to dealing with chronic illnesses got a boost Wednesday with a \$180,000 federal grant.

Blue Hill Memorial Hospital applied for the grant on behalf of a regional health network made up of all three of Hancock County's hospitals and a variety of local health promotion organizations and statewide agencies. The goal, according to Catherine Princell, a chronic disease management nurse at BHMH, is to develop a collaborative approach to treating chronic diseases that involves the hospitals, providers, patients and communities.

The grant targets the rural county, which has been designated as medically under-served and which has seen an increase in patients with chronic illnesses. In fact, Princell said, there has been an increase in the number of county residents who have been identified with more than one chronic disease.

"We have a chronic disease problem in the county that, as a network we need to work on more uniformly," Princell said Wednesday. "The grant will allow us to develop the network, to look at the needs in the area and within the system that exists, look at how we can work together."

The three-year grant will focus more on programs that would create state-of-the-art practices in existing facilities that will help patients to become more involved in their care both in health management and preventive systems and to work with communities in the county to identify ways to increase patient knowledge and understanding about chronic diseases and support patients outside of what the medical facilities can provide.

The network would provide the leadership in developing and managing the integrated system that is being envisioned.

The goal, according to Princell, is not to create more health care facilities in the county, but to identify programs in existing facilities and find ways to make those programs more accessible to the people in Hancock County.

The grant will fund the position of a network director, and in the first six months the plan is to develop the management system that will oversee the operation of the network. Time also will be spent on identifying additional interested parties who would be included in the network, she said.

Network members currently include BHMH, Mount Desert Island Hospital, Maine Coast Memorial Hospital, Union River Health Education Council, Healthy Peninsula, Healthy Acadia, Bucksport Bay Healthy Communities, University of New England, Maine Network for Health, Maine Health Alliance and Eastern Maine Health Systems.

[rhewitt@bangordailynews.net](mailto:rhewitt@bangordailynews.net)  
667-9394

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