

Family Living Programs Creating Health

Situation

Women as caretakers of families often spend more time handling the health care needs of family members than they do handling their own health issues. This is partly because reliable information about women's health issues is only now coming into the mainstream. Women's health in Wisconsin has an important social and economic impact, as women often make decisions for their family about health care and healthcare spending. Women are the primary caregivers in most families, as they select doctors, have children immunized, buy medicines, and are responsible for the family's nutrition.

Women who are responsible for family health care need help to sort out rapidly changing information and make wise choices. Increasingly these consumers also recognize the need to become better informed about healthy lifestyle practices that affect the overall health and wellness of their families and as a step toward disease prevention. Changes in the health care delivery system have placed more responsibility on consumers to become involved in decision-making for their personal health care and treatment plans. Giving women more information and control in their own health decisions can empower women to take care of their own health as they care for their families.

Response

Creating Health was a two-year project created to tap into the growing expertise on women's health issues. Wisconsin Public Television spearheaded the project in collaboration with partners including Cooperative Extension's Family Living Programs. Since Family Living Programs county-based faculty and staff promote the idea of consumers being informed in their health decisions, several participated in planning the group and interactive components of the project. The project integrated televised program broadcasts with other components including a supportive web site, a discussion guide for use with taped versions of the broadcasts, a health planner through which women can track their health records and focus on healthy behaviors, health fairs and a photo exhibit. The broadcasts were designed to be both educational and give an opportunity for audience participation.

"My Healthcare Provider and Me," aired April 2000. A four-part series providing an overview of women's health throughout the life span aired in the Fall of 2000. The first broadcast also included interactive television (ITV) enhancements including biographies of health experts, women's health statistics, health tips and links to other health resources on the Web. The web site (<http://www.wpt.org/creatinghealth>) was designed to provide supportive materials for the televised broadcasts, and the Family Living Programs health specialist designed the portion of the site devoted to providing an unbiased source linking to web-based reliable information about a variety of women's health issues. The site also offers a downloadable PDF version of the Health Planner.

Outcomes

- An estimated 350,000 viewers watched the Wisconsin Public Television broadcast programs.
- Women in five counties (La Crosse, Marathon, Oneida, Sauk and Washington) participated in Family Living Programs facilitated discussion groups around live or taped broadcasts.

- Forty-eight groups statewide logged on and participated in the interactive television component of the first broadcast.
- There were 31,000 web site visits during the four-month period when the four-part series aired (Sept. through Dec., 2000), an average of 255 hits per day.
- A total of 10,000 Women's Health Planners have been distributed—most through viewer requests and the Well Women Program of the Wisconsin Department of Health, and some at other Extension events nationwide.
- The broadcasts, planner, participants and photo exhibit in the project received favorable coverage in newspapers and targeted media throughout the Wisconsin Public Television coverage area.
- By integrating broadcast and outreach activities, Creating Health addressed the state of women's health in Wisconsin and gave women more information and control in their own health decisions.

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