

Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

LHA Training Lights the Way to Good Health

Lay health advisors (LHAs) in Beaufort, Bertie and Martin Counties headed to the classroom last summer and fall to study new advising techniques and expand their knowledge about cancer risks and early detection.

LHA trainees were full of praise for NC-BCSP's updated LHA curriculum. Barbara Council, a new Martin County LHA, said she highly recommends the training, and added, "Learning about ways to communicate with women was so informative. I apply it to everything."

The new training program includes activities designed so all the lay health advisors, ranging in ages from their 20's to their 80's, can participate fully. The curriculum also celebrates the strong commitment of NC-BCSP LHAs to spiritual health. Each training session opens and closes with a prayer. Then, after studying cancer statistics, risk factors and screening recommendations, the LHAs learn to practice stage-based advising strategies in a spiritual context. For women who have never had a mammogram, LHAs learn to *Witness* about the benefits. For women who know the benefits of screening but for one reason or

another are not complying with screening recommendations, LHAs *Light the Way* on how to overcome barriers. Finally, for women who are being screened routinely, LHAs offer encouragement and

Praise! According to Martin County LHA Sennie Harrell, the new advising strategy "gives us a way to really put women at ease. I've been talking to this woman who's really reluctant. But, from the training, we know how to talk to someone like that!"



Retrained Bertie LHA Estella Simons shows off her educational necklace.

In Beaufort County, where the rate of mammography use remains low compared to surrounding counties, the training focused on honing LHAs' advising skills to promote mammography among "harder-to-reach" women. In Bertie and Martin Counties, however, the

training program was expanded to promote Pap testing as well as mammography. Black women are twice as likely as White women to develop cervical cancer and more than two times as likely to die from this cancer.

NC-BCSP's updated training program for Martin and Bertie County LHAs includes information about risk factors for breast and cervical cancer, how often women should be screened, and how to counsel women to get Pap smears and mammograms using the stages of change theory. The curriculum included information about female anatomy and a video of a Pap test being performed. Ms. Harrell described these aspects of the training as "absolutely necessary" and went on to explain, "Women are going to ask you questions, and you need to know what you're talking about."

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Spotlight on Martin County: Lay Health Advisors...

What do the numbers 71 and 70 mean in eastern North Carolina? In Martin County, 71 is the percentage of African American women who have had a mammogram in the past two years; 70 percent is the national goal of Healthy People 2010 for regular mammography screening. How has Martin County managed to exceed the Healthy People screening goal years ahead of schedule? Through the work of dedicated lay health advisors!

Shirley Respass is one LHA whose high levels of energy and enthusiasm are typical of Martin County's busy LHA groups. Martin County LHAs sponsor many events and Ms. Respass participates in all of them. According to Martin County Community Outreach Specialist Eva Hill, "If a function is going on in the county, Shirley always calls me to see if there is anything she can do."

Ms. Respass' untiring support doesn't come as a surprise to those who know her. As a member of Mount Zion Holiness Church, she serves in many ways. She is a church trustee, vice-president of the pastor aid club, secretary of the women's fellowship group, member and treasurer of the senior choir, and a member of the missionary and program committees. She's even the church's interior decorator!

Talking to women isn't a new skill for Ms. Respass. Since she retired as an operator at the telephone company, she has combined her soothing voice with her LHA knowledge to encourage many women to get mammograms.

Another remarkable woman is Ethel Blanks of Hamilton, NC. According to LHA Nellie Council,



Shirley Respass



Ethel Blanks

"Ethel has innovative ideas that are very good. We knew her outreach to touch her sisters with our message would be broad."

Ms. Blanks volunteers with the Hamilton Election Board and works as a nurse's aide at Hamilton Baptist retirement home. She is active at Sycamore Baptist Church, where she serves as chair of the Community Outreach and the Vacation Bible School, is co-superintendent of the Sunday School, and sings in the senior choir. She performs at LHA gatherings, bringing everyone to their feet. Ms. Blanks embodies a message from one of her favorite songs that says serving others "don't cost much."

Ms. Respass and Ms. Blanks are among the 49 inspired and energetic Martin County LHAs (turn to Page 6 for a complete list). As a group each year, Martin LHAs organize walking teams for the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. In the past five years, they have raised \$20,000 for cancer research and public awareness. In 2001, Martin LHAs distributed 10,000 church bulletin

inserts with early detection messages to more than 24 area churches in recognition of Easter, Women's Day, Men's Day and National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. They take every opportunity to bring the

message of cancer awareness to their communities.

Exceeding the Healthy People goal by a percentage point isn't a place to stop, it's the beginning of their new goal — 100% of all women getting screened as recommended! 📌

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