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University focuses on women's health

WVU receives \$150,000 award for new center

BY GARY GRAY The Dominion Post

CONFERENCE SPEAKER compares women's treatment in Appalachia to Third World. See **Page 2-B**.

A new designation as a "National Center of Excellence in Women's Health" could help WVU lift the state from its national ranking of 49th in women's health care.

The designation by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services comes with a \$150,000 award, which is part of about \$2.9 million awarded to WVU and the other 21 centers across the country.

"Overall, West Virginia received a flunking grade in 2004," said Dr. Barbara Ducatman, WVU's chair of pathology at the Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center. "With this designation comes the start of new research and new efforts for education and outreach."

The announcement came at the opening of the fifth annual Women's Health Policy Conference, which kicked off Monday at the Radisson Hotel in Morgantown. The theme: "Exercise your Body, Rights and Mind."

The conference, which concludes today, is studying women's health and the policies that can improve it.

As a National Center for Excellence in Women's Health, WVU will serve as a model academic health center that provides integrated and comprehensive women's health services. The university will incorporate the five core components of clinical care, research, medical education, community outreach and faculty development.

"This is something in which we believe very, very strongly," said John E. Prescott, WVU's School of Medicine dean. "Look at the other centers out there, and you'll see that we've joined an impressive group. This puts us among other institutions, such as Harvard."

Ducatman said that in 2004, West Virginia ranked at or near the bottom in women's health care.

"We rank 50th (out of 51) for obesity, 49th for diabetes, 50th for smoking with a concomitant (associated) lung cancer rank of 49th and 50th for dental visits," she said. "With today's award, we can start to change these statistics."

The National Center for Excellence in Women's Health consists of a clinical care center that provides one-stop shopping for women's health care needs. Educational programs for health care providers also are provided.

Organized for nurses, social workers, counselors, health care professionals, legislators, community members and women's advocates, the conference links health care providers and policymakers to improve women's health in West Virginia.

On Tuesday, participants reviewed how West Virginia women's health measures match up to national standards. Discussions also were held to discuss differences between women's and men's health and look at specific conditions and problems, such as obesity and reproductive health.

Today, the conference is devoted to discussing policy changes that would improve women's health in West Virginia. The discussions help set the women's health agenda for the Legislature in February, said chairwoman Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer, D-Monongalia.

One of the main objectives of the conference is to get health care providers, researchers and policymakers together at the same table, Fleischauer said.

She also commented on the importance of focusing on women's health issues.

"We're not 'little men,'" Fleischauer said. "Not only do we have a reproductive side, we require different medications and show different symptoms. And we live longer, so it's very important that health care providers pay attention."

Today's agenda

Today's agenda for the fifth annual Women's Health Policy Conference at the Radisson Hotel in Morgantown:

- 9 a.m., Ruth Kershner and Linda Cooper discuss motivating wellness in West Virginia women.
- 10:15 a.m., multiple policy workshops on a number of issues.
- 12:30 p.m., roundtable discussion with legislators and policymakers about conference topic.



Gary Gray/The Dominion Post Elaine Bowen (left), WVU Extension Service's families and health program unit extension health specialist, speaks about WVU's designation by the U.S. Department of Education as a "National Center of Excellence in Women's Health" Tuesday at the Radisson Hotel. Joining Bowen is (left to right) Barbara J. Howe, WVU Center for Women's Studies director, Barbara S. Ducatman, M.D., WVU department of pathology professor, and John E. Prescott, WVU School of Medicine dean.