CenteringPregnancy ®: A New Approach to Prenatal Care

Babies born full term have better rates of good health outcomes than babies born preterm. Premature birth is the #1 cause of death of babies in the United States. Premature births, along with low birth weights, puts babies at risk for many long-term health problems including chronic lung disease, blindness, hearing loss, intellectual disabilities, and cerebral palsy. While the average normal gestation for full term babies is 40 weeks, preterm births occur when babies are delivered before 37 weeks. The preterm birth rate in the United States averages 9.8% and is only slightly higher in Peoria County at 10.6%. What is cause for concern in Peoria County is the greater disparity of preterm births at a much higher rate of 13% for Black/African American babies compared with white babies at 9.7%, as reported in the 2017 Peoria County Maternal and Child Health Report.

The greater disparity of high preterm birth rate in Peoria County is now a focal point for the Reproductive Health Workgroup that addresses strategic health issues in the region’s Community Health Improvement Plan. To improve the health ratings of Peoria County residents and decrease this disparity in preterm birth rates, the Reproductive Health Workgroup has chosen CenteringPregnancy ® as a program strategy to bridge the gap and assure that best health practices in prenatal care are available to women at risk of preterm births.

CenteringPregnancy ® is an alternative to traditional prenatal care that adds a group support process to the care. This form of healthcare is patient-centered, follows nationally recognized guidelines, and allows time and flexibility to meet the needs of each individual. CenteringPregnancy ® provides engagement and learning in a group setting, while still assuring each person meets individually with their medical provider. Participants are assigned to a group of women with similar due dates to encourage peer support and share experiences. CenteringPregnancy ® has been shown not only to decrease the rate of preterm birth and low birthweight babies, but also to improve breastfeeding rates and better pregnancy spacing which are good for babies and moms. Another outcome is that disparities in health are lowered according to Centering Healthcare Institute, “African American women, who are at higher risk for preterm birth in the US, experience lower risk of preterm birth when enrolled in CenteringPregnancy ® than in traditional care.”
After identifying CenteringPregnancy® as a feasible strategy for Peoria, the Reproductive Health Workgroup chose a collaborative approach by forming a steering committee to advance the program. The steering committee works with the strengths of partnering organizations that include individuals from Peoria City/County Health Department, University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria, Heartland Health Services, and the City of Peoria.

With initial challenges of building interest in this newer concept of prenatal care and securing funding the new committee’s first success came in receiving a grant from March of Dimes, followed by an additional grant from the UnityPoint foundation. With these grants, the committee was able to begin the first CenteringPregnancy® group in 2018 at Heartland Health Services Carver, as well as hire a co-facilitator to promote, recruit and organize the groups. Community interest is growing with information and referral requests from individuals, organizations, and local medical providers. By April 2019, the committee expects to complete 4 additional CenteringPregnancy® groups and expand sessions to a second location at Family Medical Center.

For more information, visit these websites:
CenteringPregnancy® in Peoria: www.centeringpregnancypeoria.com/
Reproductive Health Workgroup: www.healthyhoi.org
Peoria City/County Health Department: www.pcchd.org

Compton currently serves as Child & Family Health Coordinator at Peoria City/County Health Department and uses her subject matter expertise in local planning, development, and implementation strategies to address maternal and child health priorities. Learn more about the benefits of public health policies and programs at www.pcchd.org - Peoria City/County Health Department, a nationally accredited public health department.

###

The Peoria City/County Health Department continues efforts to improve community health in Peoria County with the overarching goal “to increase the number of people who are healthy at every stage of life.”