

Coalition takes fight to cancer locally

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With the Roanoke Valley having a breast cancer mortality rate higher than the state average, an area breast cancer coalition hopes their conference later this year will create a pink print around Northeastern North Carolina. “This is a situation and what causes us to come and work together,” said Pat Peele, a member of the Roanoke Valley Breast Cancer Coalition.

At a stakeholder’s luncheon Thursday at Halifax Regional, Peele talked about hosting a regional conference in Halifax County called, “Voices from the Valley: Provider-Patient Communication along the Breast Cancer Continuum of Care in Northeastern North Carolina,” and what could be done to help. Out of 100 counties in the state, Halifax County is ranked 99 and Northampton 93 in terms of overall county health. Both counties have breast cancer mortality rates higher than the state average of 24.2 percent. Peele said Halifax’s rate is 36.6 percent, while Northampton is 31.9 percent. She noted white females have a higher incident rate of breast cancer in the Roanoke Valley; minorities have a higher mortality rate.

“We should be concerned about the situation,” she said. With the conference, possibly the first Saturday in November, Peele said the goal is to bring patients and providers together. “It will be a patient-centered conference, so people can access information,” she said.

“We chose the Kwanzaa principle of ‘Ujima’ as the theme, which means collective work and responsibility.” The coalition links women to breast cancer screening services, diagnostic, treatment and survivorship care.

Audrey Hardy, Coalition project manager, said the effort brings together frontline health care workers from all organizations and agencies in Northeastern North Carolina to their commitment to reducing breast cancer

mortality. Peele added, “Frontline workers are the ones to interact with the patients. (The patients) aren’t just faces but family, neighbors and friends.”

In its first year, the coalition did strategic planning to identify the best ways to maximize local services and leverage state and national resources in order to better provide health care to women at every point in care. Training and development workshops on advocacy and clinical trials were done. A free breast cancer clinic provided clinical breast exams for 28 women in need of screening.

“The Roanoke Valley Breast Cancer Coalition aims to create a bold ‘Pink Print’ across Northeastern North Carolina and boost our region’s capacity to improve breast cancer outcomes, especially among women who are medically underserved,” Hardy said.

The coalition was launched in November 2010 by the Rural Health Group with a one-year Legacy Grant from the Southeastern U.S. Collaborating Center of Excellence for Eliminating Disparities based at Morehouse School of Medicine. Alexis Moore, project director at the University of Chapel Hill Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, was pleased to announce the Gregory B. Davis Foundation won a second one-year Legacy Grant. “It is really phenomenal,” she said. Grants are up to \$25,000. For more information about participating in the Coalition or to help with the conference, contact Ms. Hardy at alhardy@gbdf.org or Brenda Bracey, Gregory B. Davis Foundation chief operations officer, at bbracey@gbdf.org.



State Rep. Angela Bryant, D-Rocky Mount, talks with Barbara Ellis Harris, director of the Halifax County Health Department Thursday.

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Kathy Whitaker Knight, left, outreach coordinator for the East Carolina University Center for Health Disparities Research catches up with Pat Peele, training coordinator for Roanoke Valley Breast Cancer Coalition, before the coalition's Stake holder meeting Thursday.



Walter Sheppard of the Komen Foundation Triangle affiliate and Grace Wright, health promotion assistant at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, before Thursday's luncheon

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