

Diabetes: A Family Matter Health Fairs

Brief Description:

Most health professionals are familiar with health fairs and have participated in at least a few during their career. Some people in the community are eager to attend health fairs. One challenge with these events is reaching all of the people that need the information. Those that attend health fairs are often people that are already paying attention to the health needs. A big challenge is to find ways to attract those that are less likely to attend a traditional kind of health fair. This activity suggests some ideas to consider when planning and organizing your next health fair.

Objectives:

1. Empower local people with information about ways to be responsible for their health.
2. Provide low cost screenings.
3. Increase knowledge about a healthy life that is enriched by physical activity and healthy eating.
4. Increase knowledge about diabetes prevention and diabetes self-management.

Participants:

While health fairs can be targeted for certain groups of people, most are of a more general nature. The participants should be ALL of the community residents. It could be helpful to form a committee or a task force to organize the health fair. Be sure to allow plenty of time for the planning and networking needed to organize an excellent health fair. Use some of the resources listed at the end of this activity to help plan.

Costs:

Health fairs are generally free. They are generally sponsored by hospitals, health departments, those with health grants, and others in the community. Community health professionals and other volunteers usually give of their time to do these events.

Activity Duration:

A health fair can last a few hours, an afternoon or evening, a whole day, or even several days if you want to also deliver some services to participants. You will need to decide what you want to offer at the health fair and then make plans for the time needed.

Materials Needed:

Materials will need to be organized for your fair, but these will vary based upon the kind of event you plan. Usually each exhibitor, health professional, and vendor brings their own materials and supplies. However, you may need to supply tables, chairs, tents, water to drink, and even outdoor potties if it is an outdoor event not near a public facility.

The Health Fair:

A health fair is a great way to inform people about health, wellness, prevention, and disease self-management. It can bring health care professionals and community people together outside of a health care setting. The fair is a way to educate, answer questions, and give demonstrations, mini-classes, screenings, and exhibits. A great

health fair should include a network of organizations that provides many services.

A key part of a successful health fair is adequate and thoughtful planning. A successful health fair needs clear goals for what is to be accomplished. Once the goals have been set, the planning committee needs to decide the best ways to meet them. Consider who you aim to reach with the health fair. It might be best for several counties to work together in the effort.

Things to Consider in Health Fair Planning

- Who will serve on the planning committee?
- Where and when will the event occur?
- Who will set up the fair? What about clean up?
- What are the concerns about liability and safety issues?
- What special equipment will presenter need?
- What special accommodations need to be made for the event?
- Who is the audience?
- How will you assure that attendance goals are met?
- How will you evaluate the event?
- What are the topics you want to cover?
- Who will be invited to participate in the fair (health professionals, exhibitors, clinicians, vendors, etc)?
- How will you register those that attend?
- Where and how will individualized counsel be given to participants after screening results are provided?

A first concern is to assure that everyone who can benefit from a health fair actually attends! Thus, it is important to make the event attractive to a various people in your target audience. Many people that live in Appalachia either lack health insurance or are underinsured. Others might have health insurance, but might be limited by the lack of availability or access to local health professionals. Transportation is a barrier for some that might want to attend. Still others may think some events are not for them! Be sure the health fair is held in a place where most community people are likely to be comfortable. For example, if it is to be a large county event then you might want to make arrangements to use the county fairgrounds. Foe a smaller event, a community building or a public school might work well.

Many could fail to learn about the event if the information is not placed where they are likely to see it. The time the event is held can also be a problem. Often health fairs are scheduled for the convenience of working health professional. However, community people are working also and may not be able to attend. Thus, it might be good to consider a weekend as a good time for an event. Some communities have a number of small health fairs during the year sponsored by a variety of different groups. It might serve the community well to plan a single comprehensive event that can be attended by many needing health care services and health information.

Perhaps an annual health county fair where everyone can collaborate will be the best way to reach more residents. If everyone worked together, the chances to create a truly successful event could be enhanced. If

you have a hospital in your county, you will certainly want them to take an active role. If you have a college or university where health professionals are taught you could include them. If there is a college of medicine, an osteopathic school of medicine, or a nursing program, plan to invite faculty members and students to take part. Involve the local health department and others who provide related health services including physicians and their office staff if possible. Do not forget others that provide a variety of health care services.



If you plan an annual community health fair, then you might want to take a broad approach to defining health. In other words, seeing health as a holistic need means that you might want to have a broad array of services represented. For example, you might want someone from Jobs and Family Services, HUD, and other social services. You might want to include some other social services such as a local homeless shelter, food pantries, women's shelter, and someone that can address concerns of abuse and violence. You might want to also include someone from your children's services that can share information about the work they do. Another person to include is a local librarian, a person that can show examples of books and other materials available at the library. You might

even want to have someone available to show some local people how to find trustworthy health information on the internet.

Family is where health begins! It is the daily routines of multiple household members that influence wellness and illness. Aim to attract family groups, craft an event that local families might see as an interesting outing. Create a time and place that families will want to attend together. You might want to involve some gym teachers from the local schools or an exercise physiologist or local people that can lead aerobic and chair exercises to get people involved. Have anyone local that would be willing to do some massage or teach stress management and/or relaxation techniques. You might want a health craft corner set up for the younger children or even a babysitting service so that parents can get full benefit from the event.

Too often our target is to address individual needs; we might get better results by finding ways to impact all family members at the same time. If you truly want to make the health fair have a family focus, you must be sure advertisement for the event reflects this theme. You might want to consider some specific health information about being active and healthy eating to give families as they leave the fair.

People need to see a reason to give up their time and make efforts to attend. If they ask themselves the question, "What is in it for me?" and cannot clearly identify an answer, they will not attend the fair. So the things that occur at the event need to be ones viewed as useful, helpful, or at least entertaining! Sometimes people do not

appreciate free things, and so a modest admission charge that provides folks with a ticket for a drink and a piece of fruit or some other healthy item might help cover those costs. You will need to consider what might work best in your community. You can always provide 'scholarships' for those unable to pay.

Having persons do mini-presentations about parenting, safe sex, budgeting, or other life skills could attract many local people. Include some mini-talks about things like immunizations, healthy lifestyles, talking to your doctor, locating health resources, depression, alcohol use, tobacco,, etc. Be sure to consider things for people of all ages, senior center information, meals-on-wheels programs, Passport, Area Agency for Aging, etc. Include things for kids and youth such as scouts, 4H, local Boys and Girls Club, DARE, etc. Be sure to have information about prenatal care, parenting, WIC, child wellness programs, and women's health. Invite the Cooperative Extension Agency and see if they can do some cooking demonstrations. Consider what kinds of environmental information can be shared. What special things can you have to attract the men in the community? The more of these kinds of things you can tie into your health fair the more interesting it becomes for people.

If you want to focus at least part of your health fair on diabetes prevention and self-management, then it would be important to try to locate an endocrinologist or a diabetologists that might be willing to donate some time for the fair. Other specialists you might want to include would be dentists, podiatrists, a mental health

counselor, dietician, and diabetes educators. You will likely need to contact all of these individuals and gain their support. It might help to have someone who has some well-respected or a person with political influence try to get their involvement. It would be good to have some mini-diabetes education sessions and plenty of educational materials available. You could even have a few special sessions just about family support. You might even want to include some vendors that could talk with people about glucose monitors. Of course you will want to do some blood glucose screening. It would be helpful to have plenty of volunteers available to answer questions for those with diabetes and their family members. You want to be sure that fair participants can obtain the information needed for diabetes self-management and prevention of complications.

Things to Include in a County Health Fair

- Exhibitors that can provide health information.
- Entertainment.
- Refreshments.
- Someone to answer questions.
- Someone to counsel about meanings of various screenings and the outcomes.
- Clinical support.
- Mini-workshops.
- Vendors.

A prime purpose of the health fair should be prevention and education that empowers participants to be responsible for their health. However, an equally important purpose is to do screenings that detect things that have not previously been

diagnosed. It is also important to be able to give people follow-up information about what their screenings mean. These individuals need information about what they need to do and ways to attend to the needs. Adequacy of participants' resources to care for health problems also needs to be addressed. Making referrals and giving follow-up information can help. Have a plan to check back with those with irregular screenings to assure that they followed up in the week or two after the health fair. In order to fully meet goals for a fair, you will want to take steps to be sure identified problems are addressed.

You may want to give every fair participant a form that they take with them as they proceed through different stations at the health fair. If they have it marked by each place they attend you will have a good idea about which sessions were most popular. You might even want a simple way on the form for participants to indicate how useful the session was for them. You might want a different survey for youth and teens. Be sure to think about how you will collect these as people leave. Perhaps giving them a special magnet or other small item when they turn in their form will encourage their return.

Screenings Areas to include in a Health Fair

- Vision
- Hearing
- Diabetes
- Dental
- Heart or Cardiovascular
- Cancer

Many regions of the Appalachian region lack specialist care. Some counties do not have hospitals and residents are forced to travel great distances for this care. If possible, secure some volunteer physicians, specialists, nurse practitioners, clinicians, etc. to do some clinical assessments and treatments during the health fair. Given that many people do not have access to any services, this could be a wonderful way to serve the poor and underserved in your county. If the need is explained to medical professionals, many will likely be willing to volunteer their efforts. Be sure to contact any local colleges of medicine or schools of nursing and see what ways you can join forces.

See if you can get a dentist and some dental hygienists to assist in the efforts. Many people that need eye check-ups do not go! Can you find an optometrist to volunteer? Lions Clubs can often assist with some used glasses. Decide what screenings to include besides blood glucose. You might consider blood pressure, BMI, cholesterol, hearing, vision, etc. Is there a mobile van that can be available to do some mammography screenings? You might also want to have an EMS squad available and a first aid station set up. You never know what might happen!

An important thing to consider is entertainment and food! If you have a local organization or more that is willing to make a contribution and provide some free food items, which always makes people happy. Try to keep it healthy and model the behaviors you want to teach others. See if you can get some fresh apples or bananas or other fruit to give everyone. Have plenty of celery sticks, carrot sticks,

and popcorn on hand. You will need to search out your local talent. Having some music going on while people are waiting can always help. Be sure to have plenty of chairs available at various stations throughout the fair as some people attending might not be able to stand for long time periods. Also consider the mobility needs of less-able-bodied persons.

An important part of your health fair is plans for ways to fully evaluate it. What went well and what things or processes can be improved? Did you have 'bottle-necks' at any point of the fair such as registration or screening areas? Were the goals set for the event actually met? Was the attendance what you had hoped for? Did participants seem to appreciate the event? How many irregular screenings were found? Were exhibitors and vendors satisfied with the fair?

Involve volunteer *SUGAR Helpers* to assist with after the fair follow-up. Sending letters of thanks to those that participated can help guarantee that they might be available again next year. Be sure to provide each volunteer a satisfaction survey in order to capture their ideas about what worked well and what can be improved next time. Be sure to have the news media present the day of the health fair. Then after you have the feedback from the event, share reports of what was accomplished (e.g., numbers attended, volunteer participants, numbers of screenings completed and irregular ones identified, etc.).

Final Word:

If your community completes a **health fair**, please be sure to go to the *Diabetes: A Family Matter* website <www.diabetesfamily.net> and

share with others what worked and what did not work. A place on the **Communicate** Section of the website will be available for sharing your ideas. Others will be interested in learning about what you have done and what the outcomes were. If you have a website, please be sure to post the link so that others can take a look.

Resources:

Do a literature search to find many papers published in professional journals about health fairs. You can search on the internet for these. Try using Google Scholar to help your search or use a local college or university library. Many articles have been published about ways to conduct successful health fairs. Completing some reading about the topic will likely give you many new ideas to consider in your planning efforts.

9Health Fair

<http://www.9healthfair.org/default.aspx>

In 1987, 9Health Fair became a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. This Colorado based group has the mission of promoting health awareness and encouraging individuals to assume responsibility for their own health. It has used a core of statewide volunteers to provide health fair that provide free and low-cost health awareness and educational screenings. You can find some excellent ideas here for expanding what you do locally to assist people to become more responsible for their health.

A Guide to Organizing and Promoting Health Fairs (AAP)

<http://www.aap.org/family/healthfairkit.htm>

You can find a good guide here for setting up your own health fair. It gives information

about things like exhibitors, publicity, fair logistics, and evaluation.

Appalachian Medical Missions (Virginia College of Osteopathic Medicine)

<http://www.vcom.vt.edu/resource/MM/missions-appalachia.html>

Medical students and faculty provide free clinics in southwest Virginia.

Health Fair Planning Guide

http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/health_fair_planning_guide/activity_ideas.php

This site suggests many different ideas to include in a health fair. You can also find a planning guide that can be downloaded that provides many excellent tips. This resource was aimed at Texas resources, but many good ideas that others can use are included.

Healthy Appalachia

<http://www.uvawise.edu/health/>

Healthy Appalachia is working to develop a common understanding of the region's health status and a strategic vision of a healthier future for the residents of far Southwest Virginia. Healthy Appalachia is a coalition between the University of Virginia, College at Wise, the Southwestern Virginia Graduate Medical Consortium, the Appalachian Regional Commission, Virginia Department of Health, and the Virginia Community Healthcare Association. This coalition seeks to provide policy makers, the medical community and the region's citizens the necessary tools and strategies to foster a healthier population.

Volunteers Give Healthcare to Uninsured in Rural Virginia (2006)

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/health/july-dec06/vahealth_08-23.html

Read the transcript about this event and see the streaming video that aired on the public broadcast system.

