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Florida Folic Acid Council

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St. John's County WIC Program Folic Acid Project

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Contributed by Susan Vetter, St. John's WIC program

Through a March of Dimes Florida Chapter grant, the St. Johns County WIC Program was given an opportunity to make a real impact on the health of mothers and babies in their county. This has given the program an opportunity to reach not only WIC clients with this important nutrition information but all members of the community.

To ensure that health professionals in the county are providing folic acid information to their female patients, we organized the first annual Perinatal Update. This conference featured experts in folic acid research as well as women's health. On a continuous basis, physician's offices are stocked with folic acid information and supplements to be distributed to their patients. In-service training is provided to physician's staff as necessary. We collaborated with local pharmacies to place stickers containing folic acid information on all prescriptions for birth control pills dispensed.

St. Johns County WIC program participates in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, which provides WIC clients with coupons that can be used at local farmers' markets to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, foods rich in folate. In an effort to promote this program, WIC sponsored Kids Day at the Farmers' Market. This event provided families with important health information and fun activities. A surprise appearance by the Power Panther added to the festivities. Folic acid literature was distributed to participants along with folic acid supplements, beach balls, nail files, and other goodies.

May was a special month for mothers in St. Johns County. All women attending health department clinics during May were given gift bags containing folic acid supplements and other goodies. To our surprise, we made one pregnant woman very happy, as this was her first Mothers' Day gift.

Since mandatory fortification, national prevalence rates for neural tube defects have declined by:

- 31% for Spina Bifida and
- 16% for Anencephaly.

—Teratology 2002; 66:33-39

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Awareness of the Benefits of Folic Acid Soar As a Result of CDC's Media Buy and Community Outreach

Innovative Community Campaign Educates Hispanic Women About Reducing Birth Defects

Contributed by the CDC and Alina Flores

Through a successful combination of paid media and local outreach, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has significantly increased awareness of the importance of taking folic acid to reduce the risk of certain birth defects in Miami's Hispanic community. In 2000, prior to the launch of the campaign, less than half (46%) of women had ever heard, read, or seen anything about folic acid compared to 63% in 2002, and an even higher percentage of women were aware of folic acid in Miami. In Miami and San Antonio, Texas, a special local outreach campaign has helped raise awareness among Hispanic women in those communities to 71 percent.

"Women can increase their chances of having a healthy baby if they make sure that they routinely get enough folic acid," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy G. Thompson said. "This campaign is helping to spread the word to Hispanic women in the Miami area so that we can give all of our children a better chance of a healthy start."

CDC will focus now on turning awareness into action by stepping up its community outreach and conducting a second wave of the paid media campaign.

"The folic acid campaign marks a significant milestone in the CDC approach to communicating public health messages," said Dr. Jose Cordero, Director of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities. "The media campaign last fall was the first time CDC had ever used paid advertising time in this manner. The impressive success we've seen in getting this important message out to women in the Miami community has led us to implement another round of the campaign in an effort to further decrease the occurrence of birth defects."

To further inform and increase awareness with Hispanic women in the community, the campaign has partnered with "promotoras," Spanish-speaking health educators based at the Little Havana Activities and Nutrition Center.

These promotoras were chosen because of their experience conducting health outreach in Miami's Hispanic community. They use a blend of traditional and non-traditional outreach tactics to reach Latina women where they live, work and play. Tactics include participating in local health fairs, working with immigration services programs to provide information to their clients, and giving presentations in adult education classes.

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Attorney General's Office to Award Vitamin Settlement Funds to March of Dimes

During 2002, the Florida Attorney General's Office announced a funding opportunity arising from a large anti-trust settlement involving certain vitamin manufacturers. The March of Dimes partnered with the University of South Florida Birth Defects Center on a proposal to fund a three-year multi-vitamin distribution program. The program was approved in the amount of \$2 million dollars for the three-year time span, but funds cannot be distributed until the appeals process finishes in the courts, which will probably happen in the Fall of 2003.

The program will support multivitamin distribution to 150,000 un-served and underserved Florida women each year, providing free vitamins through existing outlets such as community health centers, county health departments, healthy start coalitions, and the WIC program. We will work in partnership with Haitian women's centers and other interested community groups to reach women who might otherwise not ever learn about the importance of folic acid in reducing the risk of birth defects. Providing the vitamins free of charge will help many women who believe that vitamins are too expensive and that they cannot afford them. The Florida Folic Acid Council will send out a press release when the funds are awarded to announce the program.

(St. John's County WIC program — Continued from page 1)

With the support of local business, folic acid information was included with paychecks during the month of May. Each florist in St. Johns County helped support our message by displaying decorative business cards complete with folic acid information instructing the recipient to return the card for free folic acid supplements. In addition, folic acid information appeared on the county website the entire month of May.

We have developed a strong presence within the community. Folic acid information continues to be part of the ad placed in the Sunshine Bus Company map and schedule. Our outreach worker continues to participate in any community event that attracts young women. Grant funds will enable us to purchase folic acid kits for all of the high schools in our county. These kits will be used during life management classes. Through these efforts we hope to incorporate folic acid education as a standard part of preventive health care in St. Johns County.

(CDC Media Buy — Continued from page 2)

"Too often, Hispanic audiences are not reached by traditional public health campaigns, and before this campaign, many women had never heard of folic acid," said Linda Albe, a promotora. "By meeting with employees on their lunch break or working with MUJER (Mujeres Unidas en Justicia, Educación y Reforma) to reach women in migrant communities, I am able to talk with women in Miami about the importance of folic acid."

About the Campaign

The Folic Acid Miami Campaign, a community based initiative, was developed to empower Latinas in the Miami area to take steps to reduce their risk for having a pregnancy affected by a neural tube birth defect. The Campaign was convened by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), in conjunction with the March of Dimes and the National Council on Folic Acid.

Around the State—

Folic Acid and Partners in Perinatal Health Sharing Solutions Conference

Folic acid will be the subject of an hour-long presentation at the Sharing Solutions Conference scheduled for May 14-15 at the Renaissance World Gate Kissimmee. Learn about the development of culturally appropriate materials, surveillance activities, and upcoming opportunities to promote this important program for improving pregnancy outcomes and reducing the occurrence of serious birth defects. Promotional items, educational materials, and a limited number of Folic Acid Toolkits will be distributed to participants.

For a brochure and registration information, please visit the conference website at www.publichealth.usf.edu/conted/.

March of Dimes News—

The **Northwest Division** has attended several health fairs and distributed educational materials on folic acid and peanuts while talking with women of child-bearing age and families about the importance of folic acid in preventing neural tube defects. In the last few months, we have set up mission/educational booths and integrated folic acid education at FAMU, Florida State University, and Tallahassee Community College, the Education Expo at the Civic Center, Pensacola's Largest Baby Shower, and at various health fairs and Walk America Kick-offs and rallies across the panhandle. The Florida Chapter included information on folic acid in each Prematurity Summit participant's goodie bag as well.

Staff and volunteers of the **North Central and Northeast divisions** participated in four community health fairs in which the folic acid display was used and folic acid educational materials were distributed. We gave out peanuts at each event with signage identifying peanuts as a good source of folate.

NCFL Chain Reaction members were provided with folic acid education materials and speaking points for folic acid awareness campaigns in the high schools. We obtained orange juice for "folic acid breakfasts" in each school. The Collegiate Council at the University of Florida did a similar program in a commons area on campus, providing educational materials and orange juice and using the folic acid display. The staff also spoke to an African American service sorority on the UF campus on the benefits of folic acid and good prenatal care. Folic acid educational materials were distributed, along with folic acid pill box/key ring incentives. The North Central and Northeast Florida Division PSC members were given the folic acid pill box/key rings as holiday gifts, along with folic acid mouse pads.

WalkAmerica related activities included use of the pillbox key rings and mouse pads were also used as incentive gifts at a WalkAmerica team kick-off, placing folic acid flyers in WalkAmerica team captain kits, and preparing folic acid messages for mission signs to be used at six WalkAmerica sites.

A local radio station interviewed Donna Poynor, Associate Director of Program Services for the two divisions. They talked about the benefits of folic acid, how women can get folic acid, and the success of the folic acid campaign.

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Department of Health News—

Sarasota County

Staff of the Healthy Start Coalition of Sarasota County distributes folic acid literature at community health fairs and other exhibit opportunities. We also distribute trail mix (with the recipe) made from several varieties of Total cereal, dried fruit and nuts. Our exhibit includes an information sheet on folic acid, the March of Dimes folic acid quiz and the recipe brochure "Think Orange before Thinking Pink and Blue." To some health fairs we bring green leafy vegetables to promote folic acid. We always serve orange juice at our Annual Free Community Baby Shower in July. Future plans include sharing space with our local WIC office at these kinds of exhibits and to continue bringing the folic acid message to our community.

Suwannee & Lafayette County

The Health Department Staff distributes prenatal vitamins and literature to patients in the family planning clinic as well as at "general" clinic visits for pregnancy testing and counseling when the client indicates they are planning a pregnancy. We use the English and Spanish literature from March of Dimes and the Spina Bifida Association of America. This information is given during the family planning visit, regardless of whether the client is currently trying to conceive. We particularly stress this with teenagers even with a negative pregnancy test. This helps to promote the importance of good nutrition and the value of folic acid to their baby-to-be. Prenatal vitamins are dispensed to them and dietary sources of folic acid are also discussed.

Holmes County

The Holmes County Health Department provides folic acid information to pregnant women in three primary levels. The first level of folic acid awareness is provided to all women requesting a pregnancy test. This initiative was begun after our Healthy Start Family Support Worker identified the need based on the assumption that if a woman is requesting a pregnancy test, she is sexually active. While she may not be pregnant at this time, she and her future children will benefit from her beginning folic acid use prior to becoming pregnant.

A second level of folic acid awareness is during the Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women (PEPW) process. The Healthy Start Program Manager completes PEPWs for pregnant women in Holmes County and takes the opportunity to thoroughly discuss the importance of folic acid use early in the pregnancy. The third level of folic acid awareness is during the processing of Healthy Start program referrals. When a woman is referred to the Healthy Start program, she is immediately mailed information on early prenatal care, including the need for folic acid.

At all three levels, women are given detailed information specific to folic acid and recommended dosages along with encouragement to see a prenatal care provider early in their pregnancy.

Marion County

In Marion County, staff offers folic acid free of charge to all women of childbearing age who come through the health department. It is also given out in the outlying clinics, in Belleview and Reddick, plus through the Clinic on Wheels, which is our traveling clinic that serves the rural areas in our county. We counsel patients on the importance of taking the vitamin to prevent birth defects. The majority of the patients offered the education and vitamins accept it graciously. Thank you for the opportunity to inform the public about just another way the Marion County Health Department provides a service to the residents of our county.

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(Around the State—continued from page 5)

Palm Beach County

Our local WIC Program developed two client pamphlets that include information about folic acid and a list of cereals that have 100% of the daily requirement for folic acid (highlighting those that can be gotten with WIC checks). These have been shared within the Health Department and with the Women's Health Initiative (WHIN) and Healthy Start (called Maternal Child Family Health Alliance here). The pamphlet and list is available on the Florida Folic Acid Council website (www.folicacidnow.net)

We also trained a group of 10 WIC Senior Clerks on the Florida Nutrition Training Guide and augmented the postpartum section with a substantive discussion about birth defects and folic acid. We regularly facilitate nutrition education groups for postpartum women participating in WIC, and these always include a brief discussion of folic acid, its importance, and sources.

St. Lucie County

The St. Lucie County Health Department, as part of our ongoing commitment to meet the nutritional needs of our communities' moms and babies, provides folic acid educational sessions in both Clinical and Outreach programs. "Our Presumptive Eligibility for Pregnant Women (PEPW) appointments, offered daily, stress the importance of Folic Acid utilizing Public Health nurses to ensure and enhance this vital message," says Nancy Rice, R.N., Clinical Supervisor. Prenatal Vitamins are distributed along with DOH and March of Dimes brochures. Mally Chrulski, WIC Program Director, reports that her staff educates their moms on Folic Acid every week during Post-partum Nutrition classes as well as in individual sessions. "Eating well, including green leafy vegetables, dried beans and fortified cereals is emphasized during all classes," says Mally. "Healthy Start case workers encourage and help to ensure WIC program participation as part of their ongoing interactions with their moms", states Sonya Gabriel, R.N., Program Supervisor. Our Public Health Team is dedicated to promoting healthy preconception, prenatal, and postnatal outcomes that evolve into Healthy Lifetimes.

Okaloosa County

The Okaloosa County Health Department is working with two local TV stations, WEAR and WFGX to distribute promotional mailers to all the homes in our four county areas. Contained in this mailer will be a coupon for a free bottle of folic acid for all pregnant women in their first trimester. When the women come in to redeem their coupon, they will be asked to fill out some information about themselves and will be given education on the benefits of taking folic acid during the first trimester. Recipients of the mailer will be encouraged to read them by being offered prizes such as cash give-a-ways, furniture and a boat. Those that redeem coupons will be entered into drawings for these prizes and the winning names will be announced during "Who Wants To Be a Millionaire".

Activities of the Spina Bifida Association of Jacksonville

Contributed by Melissa Gollegly, SBAJ

The Spina Bifida Association of Jacksonville (SBAJ) has been supporting their community for 30 years. Through program services, support groups and direct reimbursements, SBAJ shows support through caring. If all women who could become pregnant were to take a multivitamin with the B-vitamin folic acid, the risk of neural tube defects such as spina bifida could be reduced by up to 70%. With this in mind SBAJ has made it a part of their mission to promote folic acid awareness throughout their community.

SBAJ is involved in many health fairs and other events throughout the year. At each event SBAJ sets up a booth with information about their organization and folic acid, and speaks with visitors about folic acid and its preventative nature. They also donated a folic acid basket, consisting of strawberries, folic acid, fortified cereal, oranges and information about the benefits of folic acid, to give away at the Mother and Daughter Day celebration at The Southern Women's Show. SBAJ speaks on the importance of folic acid to groups around their community, including local civic organizations and businesses. SBAJ believes that support through education and awareness are important steps in eradicating birth defects such as spina bifida.

Florida Folic Acid Council Update

Over the past three years, the Florida Folic Acid Council (FFAC) has focused on increasing folic acid awareness and consumption among women of child bearing age. Funding for folic acid education activities came from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Florida Department of Health, and the March of Dimes Mission Investment Opportunity Program grant – funding that is no longer available.

Last summer the University of South Florida Birth Defects Center submitted a proposal to the March of Dimes Florida Chapter. The proposal's goal was to help the Council not only survive this funding loss, but also strengthen its essential work. The proposal was to develop a plan of action for the Council that will enable it to become a freestanding, self-supporting entity by 2005. Funding for the proposal was approved by the March of Dimes and work will start this spring.

Over the next 12 months, the Birth Defects Center will work with the Florida Folic Acid Council Executive Committee to develop a strategic plan for the Council, summarize its past activities, and create a proposal funding template for use with state and local funding organizations. The Executive Committee is composed of representatives from the Florida Department of Health, the March of Dimes Florida Chapter, Spina Bifida Association of Florida, the University of South Florida, and University of Florida.

As more research about the cardiovascular benefits of folic acid become available, it will be important for the Florida Folic Acid Council to reach out to other organizations to spread the word about folic acid. The FFAC Executive Committee will begin exploring ways to work with these organizations to support increased consumption of folic acid.

**For more information on joining
the Florida Folic Acid Council**

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We're on the Web!
www.folicacidnow.net

Tell us how your organization has promoted folic acid!
—email us at webmaster@folicacidnow.net

May 2003 Folic Acid Awareness Month

Folic Acid Links

Organization	Web Site
Centers for Disease Control	www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/folicacid/default.htm
March of Dimes	www.marchofdimes.com/aboutus/173_769.asp (general public) www.marchofdimes.com/professionals/690.asp (professionals)
National Council on Folic Acid	www.folicacidinfo.org
Florida Folic Acid Council	www.folicacidnow.net
Spina Bifida Association of America	www.sbaa.org/html/sbaa_folic.html
Florida Department of Citrus	www.floridajuce.com/floridacitrus/health.htm#birth
Florida Department of Health	http://fbdr.hsc.usf.edu/folic.htm
Florida Department of Agriculture	www.fl-ag.com/folic/