

A few words from America's doctor

Dr. Regina M. Benjamin has a huge caseload - as U.S. Surgeon General, she oversees the health of the entire nation. Scientific research guides her vision for improving our health.

Dr. Benjamin shared her prescription for a healthier nation earlier this month at a National Leadership Forum of anti-drug coalitions all working to make our communities healthy, safe and drug-free. Representatives from Communities That Care of Lorain County attended the conference.

Dr. Benjamin's message? "A prescription pad can't always cover the things that need to be addressed." For instance adult literacy and poverty. "There are things that require more than just giving someone a health insurance card," Dr. Benjamin told over 1,000 gathered for the Leadership Forum. "Poverty has the most impact on health followed by smoking."

Slowly, we are moving from "a system of sick care to a system of wellness and prevention," she said. Clean air, healthy foods, reducing emotional stress is part of a holistic prescription for a healthier community. Keeping abreast of trends is important. Locally, as is the case nationally, we are finding a rapidly growing problem of prescription drug abuse among young people. On April 30, Communities that Care of Lorain County will collaborate with local and county law enforcement for a drug take-back day to safely dispose of medications. Countywide locations will soon be announced where outdated and unused prescriptions can be dropped off to authorities. Check our website for updated information: www.ctcloraincounty.org

Drugged driving, rivaling drunk driving, is another trend. Drugs were present more than 7 times as frequently as alcohol among weekend night-time drivers, according to a



Communities That Care of Lorain County coalition members pose with U.S. Surgeon General Regina M. Benjamin. From left are LaTonya Fenderson, of Lorain; Dr. Benjamin; Catherine Gabe, CTC Coordinator; and Janet Garcia, also of Lorain.

national survey. Ohio has already made it illegal to drive a car if there is a detectable level of drugs in the driver's blood. However, few people even know this, so watch for public awareness campaigns and driver education about drugged driving as a first step to prevent and reduce this growing problem.

Prevention must also be comprehensive, which means addressing mental health issues, Dr. Benjamin said. "Our lifetime benefits are greatest by focusing on young people," Dr. Benjamin said. Many mental, emotional and behavioral problems take root in childhood and youth. Violence, antisocial behaviors, drug abuse total \$247 billion a year in societal costs. The impact, she said, is most often seen in schools and the juvenile justice

system. Nearly one-quarter of all primary care visits involve behavioral issues.

"The take-home message is that we need prevention," Dr. Benjamin said.

Prevention includes programs that boost protective factors like strengthening family connections and values. Communities That Care of Lorain County, a countywide coalition working to prevent and reduce underage substance abuse, brought the evidence-based Strengthening Families Program to Lorain County in 2005. The free program for youth and parents or caregivers, which includes a free meal, is offered by various agencies in the county at different locations. Schools can also host the free program. The SFP program was selected back in 2005 by Communities That Care of Lorain County as a way to address risky behaviors among youth. A brochure with contact information and locations will soon be available. For more information about the program, contact the coalition at 440-282-9920 or cgabe@lorainadas.org.