



Sue Ann Thompson

Guest Editorial

The Badger Heart Program: A successful model for improving health literacy and helping women make lifestyle changes

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For the past 7 years, the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation has been working to raise awareness about heart disease as a women's health issue. While many more women are aware that heart disease is the number one killer of women, taking the lives of more women than all cancers combined, there is a significant need to focus on heart disease prevention.

Eight million women are currently living with heart disease, while 6 million have a history of heart attack or angina or both. What's even scarier is that 38% of women (compared to 25% of men) will die within 1 year of a first recognized heart attack; and 35% of female (compared to 18% of male) heart attack survivors will have another heart attack within 6 years (National Center on Health Statistics; National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and the American Heart Association's 2002 Heart and Stroke Statistical Update).

The Wisconsin Women's Health

Sue Ann Thompson is Founder and President of The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, a statewide not-for-profit organization that presents women's health education and outreach programs, funds women's health research, and provides scholarships for women in academic medicine. The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation can be reached at 800.448.5148 or www.wwhf.org.

Foundation launched the Badger Heart Program to help women take steps to reduce their risk for heart disease. What began in 2002 as simply cardiovascular health screenings has evolved into a 6-month lifestyle intervention program. In February of 2004 we partnered with Ministry Heart Care, the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services, and Pfizer, Inc to screen 322 women for cardiovascular disease (cholesterol, glucose, blood pressure)—the results of which are reported on page 24 of this issue. Nearly 200 of those women then enrolled in the Badger Heart Program and participated in 6 monthly meetings held in Tomahawk, Rhinelander, Wausau, and Stevens Point.

The program's curriculum included "knowing your numbers," exercise and physical activity, diet and nutrition, stress and depression, gender differences in cardiovascular disease, and goal setting/lifestyle changes. Each woman received a pedometer and a heart-healthy cookbook, along with motivational mailings from the Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation in between meetings with additional tips on how to incorporate the information learned into their daily lives.

Post-program evaluations from the Badger Heart Program participants told us that the program

made a significant, positive impact on their lives. In fact, 98% of the participants said that they felt the program improved their ability to make decisions about their personal health care. The program was shown to have increased individual awareness about personal risk for cardiovascular disease, improved women's health literacy about cardiovascular disease and women's unique symptoms, provided specific strategies for making incremental changes, and provided an environment that supported efforts for personal change.

There is no question about the positive and direct impact that lifestyle has on preventing and treating heart disease. As a direct result of participating in the Badger Heart Program, 77% of the women are walking more often, 77% are reading food labels more carefully, and 76% have added more fruits and vegetables to their diet. Participants told us:

"I know how to eat smarter and have employed strategies for improving my health through diet and exercise. I regularly wear my pedometer."

"This was the greatest program. It has helped me make better choices, healthier choices in eating. I've lost

weight, feel better, and exercise more.”

“I added fiber, fruit, vegetables, water, exercise, further information, and goal setting to my agenda. This program has changed how my family lives; my husband’s cholesterol has gone down 26 points, and he has lost 10 pounds.”

The Badger Heart Program also improved the health literacy of the women who participated. Thirty-one percent (31%) of participants reported that the program improved their knowledge about women’s unique symptoms for heart attack and stroke. Additionally, a pre-program and post-program test showed a significant improvement in the participant’s level of knowledge about cardiovascular disease risks, symptoms, and prevention. Prior to the program, the group had an average score of 63%; the average score after participating in the program was 81%.

Over the course of the 6-month program, Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation staff saw firsthand how essential it is to show women how to make simple and incremental lifestyle changes within the context of their daily lives. Many of the women had misperceptions about what it means to exercise and to eat “right.” Showing that exercise doesn’t have to take place in a health club and explaining the benefits of walking helped many of the women become more physically active. Many participants were unaware of the influence family tradition had on their eating habits. Helping them to become more conscious of the nutritional quality and quantity of the food they were eating was a positive first step down the path to good health for many of the women.

We also saw the impact that be-

longing to a group has on individuals. We often overheard the participants talking about their personal successes and challenges, encouraging one another, and sharing ideas for overcoming barriers. The program provided a feeling of belonging and accountability that helped motivate women to make lifestyle changes.

Screenings Available

With support from the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation, WPS Health Insurance, and Pfizer, Inc., the Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation and Ministry Heart Care will present the Badger Heart Program in Marshfield, Wis this fall. The Badger Heart Program is appropriate for adult women of all ages, and we hope that physicians from the area will refer their female patients to the program.

Badger Heart Program health screenings will be offered on Thursday, September 29 from 4-7 PM and again on Saturday, October 1 from 9 AM until noon at the Holiday Inn in Marshfield. The screenings will be open to the public and will include a consultation with a health care professional. Women who participate in the screenings will be invited to enroll in the Badger Heart Program’s 6-month lifestyle intervention program. Both the screenings and the

program are free. For more information, please call the Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation at 800.448.5148.

The Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation has always considered itself to be a partner with health care professionals in this state. We recognize that our personal health is not the sole responsibility of our health care professionals, and we give women the tools to be proactive with their health, encouraging them to embrace a healthy lifestyle and emphasizing disease prevention.

By teaching women to become advocates for their health and by connecting them with the most current women’s health information through outreach and education programs, we are empowering them to make good decisions for their own health and their families’ health. In 2004, the Wisconsin Women’s Health Foundation touched the lives of over 75,000 women and families through education and outreach programs.

If we are going to do something about reducing the rate of heart disease among all individuals in this country, we must start with women. Women have an undeniable influence on family health. As I always say: “It all begins with a healthy woman.” A healthy woman means a healthy family.

BREAKING YOUR NON-COMPETE

You need advice on:

- Preparing to open your competing practice
- Defeating your non-compete agreement
- Using patient lists/patient solicitation
- Understanding partner/fiduciary duties

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Robert B. Corris, S.C.
Attorney at Law
414.272.8000
735 N. Water St., Suite 1440
Milwaukee, WI 53202
rcorris@corrislaw.com