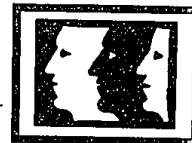


Suburban Life

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Sneaky Stephanie, 5, takes a peek at the tests her brother is undergoing.

Health tests spell relief for families on Medicaid



Sharman Cross, auxiliary health worker, weighs little Kris, 7.



Jay, 3½, sets his sights on passing the health screening administered by the eye test. It is part of the comprehensive Oakland County Health Division.

Children go in for a check-up

By Wendy Wendland
special writer

IN A SMALL church room, health technician Sharman Cross quizzes 5-year-old Stephanie: "If fire is hot, ice is . . . ?"

"Cold," shouts the pig-tailed, round-eyed youngster.

"If a horse is big, a mouse is . . . ?"

"Small," Stephanie replies instantly, grinning from ear to ear.

The enthusiastic kindergartener thought she was participating in a fun new game. But there was purpose in the play. The sentence completion exercise was a highly technical developmental test — part of a detailed physical examination provided by the Oakland County Health Department to children of families on Medicaid.

Formally called Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment, the program is part of a statewide effort. Gov. James Blanchard declared last month EPSDT recognition month.

EPSDT is administered by the health department. Permanent stations are housed both in the Southfield and Pontiac locations of the Oakland County Health Division and there is a mobile unit that travels around the county. Stephanie visited the mobile unit last week during one of its twice-monthly stops at Abiding Presence Lutheran Church in Rochester.

THE FEDERAL- and state-funded program offers children of families on Medicaid complete physical check-ups, including blood, vision and hearing tests as well as nutritional counseling.

Iron and lead tests, immunizations and a developmental test to determine whether the child is developing normally are administered to children ages 6 and under.

"If any problems are found, we refer the patient to a doctor," said Sandra Zipser, one of the two technicians who work on the mobile unit. "We always call our clients to ask them if they had any problems getting into the doctor. And if they don't have a ride, we supply one."

Referrals are not only made for major medical

'We're really a "well" clinic. We don't check sick children, we check healthy ones. And, if it weren't for this clinic, most of our patients wouldn't be checked.'

— Sandra Zipser
technician

problems. Sometimes, they're made for minor ones such as teeth cleaning.

A third of the patients in Oakland County's program are referred to a doctor, according to Carol Durkee, director of the Southfield-based program. Last month, 759 individuals were checked.

The program has three individual units — each with at least one registered nurse, one or more health technicians and a clerk.

THE STATE Department of Social Services provides a list of people eligible for the screenings. Letters explaining the program are mailed to each person on the list.

Stephanie's mother, Elaine, (who asked that her last name be withheld) said she learned about the program from such a letter.

Elaine took her oldest daughter to the clinic several weeks ago and was so pleased with the results that she decided to return with her four other younger children.

"I don't take the children to the doctor unless they're sick," said the Auburn Hills woman who is expecting a sixth child. "If it hadn't been for this program, I would never have taken them in at all (for physical examinations). It raises my mind to know the kids are healthy."

Other women bring their children for the same reasons, said Zipser, who has been with the program for 16 of its 13 years.

"We're really a 'well' clinic," the Oak Park resident explained. "We don't check sick children, we check healthy ones. And, if it weren't for this clinic, most of our patients wouldn't be checked."

Cross, the other technician, noted that the program could accommodate and benefit more teenagers between the ages of 12-21.

"It's very important for a teen and pre-teenager to get blood tests regularly to make sure they are healthy," Cross said. "I don't think enough people realize this. Also, it's a good idea for the older kids to get the hearing and vision tests, especially since the schools stop checking these things in elementary school."

About 18 appointments are scheduled a day, said Betsy Patterson, the nurse who works in the mobile unit.

Many people cancel their appointments, despite the fact that they're called in advance as a reminder and are offered transportation, Patterson said.

"It's really a shame when people don't show," Cross added. "I don't think they realize what they're missing. Besides, someone could have been scheduled in the time slot they wasted."

The mobile unit travels to several other Oakland County locations besides Rochester. People on Medicaid with children 21 and under may schedule appointments by calling 858-1766.

Betsy Patterson, a public health nurse, gets an earful from Stephanie.



Sharman Cross (left) tests Mark, 21 months, while mom, Elaine, gets a kick out of watching.

Staff photos by David Frank