

Just for women

Crittenton center offers treatment, answers

BY BARB PERT TEMPLETON
SPECIAL WRITER

A woman's health determines the well being of the whole person.

At least that's the way Bonnie Gentilia, a registered nurse and health educator at the Womens Health Center at Crittenton Hospital, sees things.

Gentilia, formally a head nurse at Sinai Hospital, has been a part-time health educator at the center for 10 years. She also works part-time as a public health nurse for Oakland County.

"We have a very well educated, well informed population in this community and what we do at the center is offer health prevention information for women," Gentilia said. "Our needs are dictated by the patients or by what's new in the field of health and wellness."

The center's staff includes several technicians and a trio of nurses who all work part-time with at least one on duty every day of the week. The center sees anywhere from seven to 18 patients a day and more than 200 people each month.

Mammogram and CATscans given at the center are by appointment, but many of the visitors are those who drop-in for literature from the center's library or to garner advice from members of the staff.

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Bonnie Gentilia

Health educator, Crittenton Women's Health Center

"If we're not with an assigned patient, we'll spend time with any one who walks in and has questions. Or if we're busy, we'll offer to set-up a 30 minute appointment for them to come back and it's all free," Gentilia said.

In fact, many of the women who visit the center simply come in and spend time getting their questions and concerns on a host of topics answered.

"With many women the anxiety level from their doctor visit can be high or they are embarrassed not knowing something and simply feel more comfortable asking us," Gentilia said. "Many times just getting their questions answered makes them feel better."

"At the same time, we inform them that these are the things you need to inform your doctor about, you have to tell them all the symptoms," Gentilia added. "We aren't in any way in a competitive thing with doctors, in fact, we enhance their practice and they often

send ladies to us."

Many of those referrals are for those who are about to have their very first mammogram. The baseline or first mammogram can be used as a comparison test against all the other exams a woman has in the future, Gentilia said.

Acknowledging that in many settings the woman waiting to undergo a mammogram is sitting in a corridor with lots of people around which just enhances her anxiety, Gentilia said the center offers a softer approach.

"We find that there is a lot of camaraderie in our waiting room and we have lots of posters on different issues on the walls and they seem to prompt talking among the women," she said. "We just really want to meet the patient on whatever level that they may need at that time and I think we do a lot for privacy and confidentiality."

In addition to a mammogram the breast screening at the center can also

include a breast self-exam given by the nurses on a one to one basis.

"We explain to patients how important it is for them to know their own breast tissue and we teach them to map it out like a clock," Gentilia said. "And we tell them if something doesn't feel right at 2 o'clock this month get it checked out."

Other womens health issues addressed at the center include everything from osteoporosis screening to personal recommendations for fitness, diet and cholesterol matters.

Information on pre-menopause and hormone therapy are also available at the center's library. As are pamphlets on puberty issues complete with videos for parents struggling to deal with their teenagers.

"We go into the community and speak to groups about all kinds of things including preventative care and nutrition," Gentilia state.

Another area of women's health that can sometimes be down played or over looked is heart disease but at the center there are 53 different pamphlets available on heart related topics. They cover everything from angina to the signs to look for in the event of a stroke.

"Women today have so many things going on they'll say, 'Oh, so I have a lit-

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