

Fair organizers get to heart of women's health

Dallas: Participants get free screenings, with focus on cardiovascular disease

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Carmen Gomez waited patiently inside an exhibit hall at the Dallas Convention Center on Saturday.

"If you want to live longer, you need to keep up with your numbers," she said.

The numbers Ms. Gomez was waiting for were results from her blood work. She would later sit down with student from Baylor University Medical Center for a private consultation.

Ms. Gomez was one of about 1,500 women who were expected to receive free health screenings Saturday at The Women's Heart Health Fair, presented by the Sister to Sister Foundation.

The group, armed with doctors, presenters and medical equipment, wanted to increase awareness of heart disease in women. Ms. Gomez, who lives in Haltom City, said her participation was "all about health."

"This has helped me eat healthier and get regular checkups," she said.

Guest speakers and presenters filled five stages. Participants listened as researchers and doctors discussed factors that increase risk of heart disease.

On one stage, nutritionists showed how to make heart-healthy meals.

"Anytime we have the chance to screen and get women to take care of themselves, we get them to bring that to the whole family," said Dr. Cara East, a medical director at Baylor.

Keith Warzecha, a Baylor nursing student, screened participants for blood pressure, cholesterol and body mass index.

"When you get here and see the number of people without insurance, it grounds you," he said. "There are serious needs not being met, it certainly broadens your horizons."

Participants also were tested for triglycerides, blood glucose levels and cholesterol.

"It's important that everybody has some idea of their health status and this can get them started," said Lorenza Wright, a clinical care technician at Baylor who has been volunteering at clinics for more than 15 years.

Program Director Greg Kenyon analyzed each of the 17 cities hosting fairs and picked Dallas as the only one to offer kidney tests that help identify the risk of diabetes.

"Dallas is one of the most creative health venues we have and it allows us to stretch the envelope," he said.

Participants also could speak with a variety of vendors and sponsors.

Living Well, a Dallas-based health and wellness center, showcased nutrition, organization and personal health.

"I want people to learn something, we have to get this to stick," said co-founder Betty Murray. "Being able to teach and do things in a setting like this is much more proactive."

By noon, 500 women had been screened, organizers said. Eight hundred women were seen at last year's event. Awareness was the focus, organizers said, as heart disease has become the number one killer of women in the United States.

"This is looked at as a man's disease, and that's just not the case anymore," Dr. East said. "All we're doing in medicine shows men are improving and women are not. In women, heart disease only needs one risk factor."