

# HEALTHY MOMS, HEALTHY BABIES

The Institute of Clinical Bioethics at Saint Joseph's University

## HISTORY OF INITIATIVE

Due to the lack of health insurance and current socioeconomic conditions, the predominantly Hispanic community of Saint Patrick's Church in Norristown, PA is in desperate need of preventative health care, particularly prenatal care. Though many are actively involved in their parish and the community's Clinical life, few speak English proficiently and thus experience a wide-range of barriers in access to adequate health care. The immigration status of many members of the community creates additional obstacles to the access of proper and irreplaceable preconception, prenatal and postnatal care. Each year, Saint Patrick's Church in Norristown is home to between 250 and 300 births. While this growth is a cause for celebration, the lack of proper prenatal care and obstetric attention has led to many premature births, miscarriages and deaths and poses a special ministerial need that must be addressed. In the past month, the pastor of Saint Patrick's emailed those of us leading this initiative with sobering news. "I just wanted you to know that another baby died this week---one day old. When I went, they made me hold the baby. They had to induce labor since the baby was 20 some weeks old. This health promoter can't come soon enough!"



We, at the Institute of Clinical Bioethics, seek to fulfill our mission of service to others and community empowerment. Since 2012, the Institute has coordinated the unfolding and maintenance of the Mercy Health Promoter Model in service to the West African immigrant populations in West Philadelphia. Based on a third world model, health promoters who are members of the communities are educated and trained to perform screenings for hypertension, diabetes mellitus, hypercholesterolemia, and other conditions. The health promoters also help to educate the community in healthy practices such as exercise, proper nutrition and lifestyle alterations. For those in need of a referral resulting from ongoing symptoms or poor indicators, the Mercy Hospital of Philadelphia receives those patients and coordinates further care from there. This model both addresses the needs for health care in the underserved and uninsured populations, but also assists the hospitals to prevent the overwhelming financial burden of treating patients with end state renal failure through dialysis as well as other conditions that could easily have been addressed through proper and early screening opportunities.

In collaboration with Mercy Suburban Hospital, the pastor of Saint Patrick's Church and the Institute of Clinical Bioethics, the adaptation of the Mercy Health Promoter Model to the Hispanic community of Norristown was approved. In exchange for prenatal vitamins, a basic necessity during pregnancy, St. Patrick's parish has put forth six bilingual health promoters to be trained to educate their fellow parishioners on basic preventative health measures, and the repercussions if such are not taken. The specific needs of expectant mothers were a priority for the pastor of Saint Patrick's. Three women from the community are currently learning the basics of preventative care for women. It is our hope that these empowered community members will strive to educate young, pregnant women on how to properly take care of themselves, and thus their developing child. Through coordination with the Mercy Hospital Health System we will be purchasing prenatal vitamins for distribution at St. Patrick's Parish. As the program develops, we are hoping to connect these expectant mothers with comprehensive, standard of care obstetric attention.

Through numerous avenues of fundraising, we are currently working to collect donated prenatal vitamins and establish funds needed to purchase additional prenatal vitamins for the women at Saint Patrick's Church that would not otherwise have any chance to obtain this basic component of proper prenatal care.

#### GOALS FOR HEALTHY MOMS, HEALTHY BABIES INITIATIVE

For numerous years now, the Institute of Clinical Bioethics has facilitated the Mercy Health Promoter Model in collaboration with Mercy Health System in service of local African immigrant communities. By empowering community members to meet the health screening and counseling needs of fellow members of their community and coordinating referral options for serious conditions, the Mercy Health Promoter Model serves both the community and the local health systems. Each community though has particular medical needs in a cultural context. For the Hispanic community of Saint Patrick's Parish in Norristown, PA, a lack of proper preconception and prenatal care in a parish with 250-300 births a year has a significant impact on the community.

The establishment of the Healthy Moms, Health Babies Initiative came during the collaboration of the Institute, Mercy Suburban Hospital, and St. Patrick's Parish to start a Mercy Health Promoter Model in the parish community. As the model is fluid and flexible to meet the needs of each community, the need for prenatal vitamins for pregnant women in the community was recognized. In a preliminary step towards more comprehensive and proper prenatal care for these women, the Institute is working to create a source of prenatal vitamins for women in the community that would not otherwise have access to them.

As such, with the novelty of this effort in the Institute, the agreement upon a number of short-term and long-term goals will assist in focusing the efforts of the staff and the undergraduate fellows to aid in the ultimate end of enhancing the health of the pregnant women and their unborn children.

#### SHORT-TERM GOALS UNTIL FALL 2016

Compile basic information on prenatal vitamins and minimal nutrients needed for the Institute to purchase to adhere to national recommended standards; Pursue collection of financial donations and donated prenatal vitamins via campus efforts (Campus Ministry, Pro-Life Group, AED, etc.) and off-campus avenues (collections bins in local parishes, samples through PCP offices, donation letters to medical SJU alumni, etc.); Purchase enough prenatal vitamins to supply 100 women with the needed amount of vitamins for the duration of their pregnancy; Establish appropriate protocols between Institute, Saint Patrick's Church and Mercy Suburban Hospital for proper distribution and education of women in need of the collected prenatal vitamins; Establish connections with various

low-cost clinics and prenatal care providers within the community, providing these pregnant women with a larger plethora of available resources; Long-Term Goals for the Healthy Moms, Healthy Babies Initiative; Establish avenues by which consistent donation of prenatal vitamins can be sustained; Provide all pregnant women, at Saint Patrick's Parish, in need of care with viable connections and the prenatal vitamins early in their pregnancy when fetus is most susceptible to neural tube defects; Connect Saint Patrick's staff with pregnancy crisis centers and similar establishments in Philadelphia to promote more comprehensive prenatal care and safe delivery plans; Reduce the infancy death rate due to lack of proper care within the community by raising awareness and increasing resource availability.