

St. Joseph's Hospital recognizes American Heart Month

by Noah Jeffries STAFF WRITER

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BUCKHANNON, W.Va. — St. Joseph's Hospital in Buckhannon is celebrating American Heart Month by encouraging residents to partake in exercise and a heart healthy diet.

Focusing on long-term wellness is an essential way to prevent cardiovascular disease, said Dr. Daniel Brito, cardiologist at the hospital.

"The most important thing that we cardiologists recommend is to invest in the long-term," he said. "We have to create a culture of healthy eating habits, exercise and activity level. We also need to avoid any habits that will increase our risks for cardiovascular disease like smoking."

Nutritional education is often the first step toward better outcomes, Brito said.

"The diet that has shown the best benefits for the heart is the Mediterranean diet," he said. "That is a diet of predominantly vegetables, salads, greens, dry nuts and fish. Try to limit red meat, processed foods and high trans-fat foods."

While many people understand which foods are unhealthy, there remains a gap in proactive healthy eating, Brito said.

"We know what not to eat," he said. "Everyone knows what they shouldn't be eating, but we need to educate people on what entails a healthy diet."

The push for prevention is particularly vital in West Virginia, Brito said.

"Our goal is to prevent the event," he said. "Especially in Appalachia because it is the most affected area in the entire country."

Heart issues often develop without obvious symptoms, Brito said.

"Whenever we are hearing our body telling us that something is going on, we are probably late in the finding of the issue," he said. "Cardiac diseases work in mysterious ways. It's very silent until we get to the point where plaque is already obstructing our arteries or a stroke is developed."

Early detection remains the most effective tool for prevention, Brito said.

"We need to create this consciousness of evaluating our cardiovascular risk even before having symptoms," he said. "Chest pressure, tightness, worsening symptoms during activities and feeling lightheaded are all signs that cardiac disease is knocking at your door."



Brito

Primary care and evolving medical tools also have a part to play in detection, Brito said.

"Primary care providers should be able to teach their patients how to monitor their blood pressure and that monitoring blood pressure is important for tailoring treatment," he said. "We also have new technology coming out that is allowing us to detect changes early. We should be able to educate and be comfortable ordering these tests."

As American Heart Month continues, the hospital aims to lower the statistics of what remains the leading cause of death globally, Brito said.

"This month, we have a duty to raise awareness about the number one killer of humans," he said. "It is the leading cause of death."

Cardiovascular disease has a significant impact on women, Brito said.

"One in three women are affected by cardiovascular disease, but only 44% are aware," he said. "This is an important opportunity to remind everyone about this."

Disease is also prevalent among pregnant women, Brito said.

"Cardiovascular disease in new moms accounts for one third of maternal deaths," he said. "Less than 50% of pregnant women have good heart health."

Clinical research is catching up to growing needs, Brito said.

"Cardiovascular disease affects everyone," he said. "We are all together on this, so we have to raise awareness, especially for females. They have been underrepresented in many trials and we are only recently understanding the toll that cardiovascular disease has on females."

People are encouraged to take a proactive stance on prevention, Brito said.

"We can prevent most of these events with education, national changes and being more aggressive in prevention," he said. "We want to be one step ahead to avoid consequences."

"Our community needs to carry the flag," Brito said. "They need to come in and say, 'I want to be checked.' This is how we can reduce poor outcomes."