

# Your Health Matters

## EMBRACING PUBLIC HEALTH

This week, the Montgomery County Health Department is celebrating National Public Health Week. What is National Public Health Week? The goal is to bring together communities across the United States to recognize the contributions of public health.

Most of us know that when we are sick, we can visit a health care provider, like a doctor or nurse practitioner. We can receive care at a doctor's office, a clinic, urgent care, or even the hospital. These doctors and nurses provide medical care for us after we get sick.

But there are other health care professionals who also care about our health. Public health staff work every day to prevent us from getting sick in the first place. They want to help us stay well by encouraging us to make healthy food choices, to exercise, to breathe clean air by not smoking, to drink safe water, and to get recommended vaccinations.

Doctors and nurses care for just one sick person at a time, while public health workers care for the health of our whole community.

Public health and medical care are interdependent, meaning they depend on one another to succeed. They work together with other organizations to make up the whole healthcare system.

The World Health Organization defines a healthcare system as all of the organizations, people and actions whose main goal is to promote, restore or maintain health. Doctors work to restore health, while public health works to promote health, prevent illness, and maintain good health.

The healthcare system is evolutionary, meaning it constantly changes. It has to adjust to shifting needs, changing culture, different health issues, and new challenges. Sometimes public health takes the lead on an issue, and other times medical care steps to the front. One great example is the H1N1 outbreak of 2009. Medical care began seeing many unrelated patients presenting with similar symptoms. Public health stepped in to launch a wide scale investigation which resulted in the discovery of a brand new virus. Public health professionals worked with scientists to develop a vaccine, but then teamed up with the medical care community to help provide vaccinations to the public. The H1N1 outbreak demonstrated the value of public health and medical care working together in an interdependent relationship to form an effective healthcare system.

A strong healthcare system can also mean healthy behavior change for a community. Working together, doctors and nurses, public health, and other agencies can help us reduce our cholesterol, eat healthier foods and get more exercise so that we lower our risk of heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke. If we live healthier, we won't need as much medical care. We won't spend as much money on medication,

medical testing, or doctor's appointments. We'll be more productive at work, have more energy, and enjoy life more fully. Together we will make a healthier community.

Visit our website at [www.montgomerycountyhealth.org](http://www.montgomerycountyhealth.org) or our Facebook or Twitter pages to learn how we are working every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. We love taking care of your family. ■



*Linda Harman*

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