Medtronic News

Greater Twin Cities United Way and Medtronic Join Forces to Advance Health Equity in Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS - August 20, 2014 - Greater Twin Cities United Way today strengthened their long-standing commitment to improving the health and well-being of Twin Cities' communities by teaming up with Medtronic Philanthropy on a new partnership designed to promote access to quality healthcare in the region. This commitment is a five-year, $2.5-million initiative that will leverage shared research, resources and community-based approaches to give people in underserved communities a better chance to understand and manage their health, and to see a doctor or healthcare professional in their neighborhood.

Ultimately, the partnership aims to reduce health-related inequities, anchored with an effort which will significantly increase the number and capacity of front line healthcare workers. These workers will function in lower income communities to help people better manage their health and navigate available resources.

An assessment to identify and prioritize neighborhoods with the greatest need for access to community-based care within the Twin Cities is already underway. The initial results will be released in early 2015 and are expected to further guide the partnership's disparity reduction efforts.

Across the Twin Cities, chronic, noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), including diabetes, high blood pressure, and cancer continue to disproportionately affect people in medically underserved communities, including those who cannot afford care, cannot travel to care because of distance or health, have limited knowledge of their condition or how to navigate their local health care system, and do not know how or are unable, to advocate for themselves. Chronic disease also carries a significant financial impact. According to a 2008 Trust for America's Health study, about $5 billion annually is spent in Minnesota for chronic disease treatment.

A recent Minnesota Department of Health report notes that too many Minnesotans aren't as healthy as they could be. It also notes the health disparities that exist are significant, persistent and cannot be explained by bio-genetic factors. And, put in stark terms, a Robert Wood Foundation report states that life expectancy within Minnesota depends on zip code. A person born in an affluent suburb of Minneapolis or St. Paul has a life expectancy of 83+ years, while a person born in an inner city neighborhood of either city has a life expectancy of only 70-75 years.

"There are significant inequities in healthcare access. Immigrants, people of color and people living in poverty are the populations that experience this at higher levels and are particularly at risk," said Sarah Caruso, president and chief executive officer of Greater Twin Cities United Way. "Minnesota is consistently ranked as one of the healthiest states in the nation; however, we still have one of the highest incidences of chronic disease. If one lives in a neighborhood with limited resources, health care access remains separate and unequal. By partnering with Medtronic Philanthropy, we're striving to correct the course and aim for healthcare parity and healthy communities. "

Research published in the American Journal of Public Health [i] underscores that community healthcare workers make a meaningful impact by interacting with people where they gather - such as community centers or houses of worship - and serving as liaisons to the healthcare community. They are effective at helping people navigate healthy systems and resources, raising awareness of health issues and prevention and management options, and improving the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

"Increasing the number of healthcare workers who reflect the cultures and languages of communities in greatest need is a critical component to improve health equity, and is crucial for delivering cost-effective, localized interventions to meet the health-related needs of our entire region," said Jacob A. Gayle, PhD, vice president, Medtronic Philanthropy. "By investing in community healthcare workers, we hope to bring care to the door of the underserved, including racial and ethnic minority

populations. This will not only yield a high return in the form of reduced cost of care, but with improvements in individual health, we can expect increased contributions from family members, friends and coworkers. That means a stronger Minnesota."

Medtronic Philanthropy and United Way also will work to engage other community leaders and organizations who are interested in joining its efforts, in order to build a strong coalition aimed at reducing disparities.

"Everybody deserves a fair opportunity to take ownership of their health. But if, for any number of socioeconomic reasons, you don't have access to seeing a doctor or healthcare professional, then that fair opportunity is elusive," said Gayle. "We are hopeful our approach will make a difference, and hope others will join in the advancement of healthcare access."

About Greater Twin Cities United Way
Greater Twin Cities United Way collaborates with business, government and nonprofit organizations to build pathways out of poverty. We LIVE UNITED to help children succeed, stabilize families and empower healthy lives. United Way serves Anoka, Carver, Chisago, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott and western Washington counties. To volunteer, go to United Way Caring Connection. To learn about United Way 2-1-1(TM) the multilingual, statewide information and referral service, visitUnited Way 2-1-1 or dial 2-1-1 from a landline, (651) 291-0211 from a cell phone or locally, or statewide toll-free (800) 543-7709. For more information or to give online, visit www.gtcuw.org or call (612) 340-7400.

About Medtronic and Medtronic Philanthropy
Medtronic, Inc. (www.medtronic.com), headquartered in Minneapolis, is the global leader in medical technology - alleviating pain, restoring health, and extending life for millions of people around the world. Medtronic Philanthropy focuses on expanding access to quality chronic disease care among underserved populations worldwide (www.medtronic.com/philanthropy)

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[i] Predictors and a Framework for Fostering Community Advocacy as a Community Health Worker Core Function to Eliminate Health Disparities Samantha Sabo , Maia Ingram,Kerstin M. Reinschmidt,Kenneth Schachter,Laurel Jacobs,Jill Guernsey de Zapien,Laurie Robinson, Scott Carvajal
American Journal of Public Health: July 2013, Vol. 103, No. 7: e67-e73.

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