

Community Wellness Programs Make All The Difference For Health Care Insurer

He is not a doctor or social worker. But last year Tampa Bay Area resident Don Van Dyke helped deliver healthy babies, assisted senior citizens in getting flu shots and played a role in helping women schedule mammograms.

Van Dyke is head of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's (BCBSF) West Coast regional office, a 52-year-old operation that includes ?? offices and ?? employees throughout 14 counties.

The operation is best known as one of Tampa Bay's largest health care insurers, with more than ?? policyholders throughout the region. However, it's also an active community health advocate with a variety of healthful programs to its credit.

"We believe our responsibility goes beyond providing people with health care coverage," Van Dyke said. "It entails looking out for their well-being by encouraging them to take the best possible care of themselves."

Under Van Dyke's direction, BCBSF has initiated numerous preventive or wellness programs for its West Coast policyholders in the past few years. One of the most notable is Healthy Addition, a prenatal counseling and education program that has helped reduce high-risk pregnancies on the West Coast.

"A high-risk pregnancy doesn't have to have an unhappy ending. There are so many things you can do to help expectant mothers, such as making sure they get the proper vitamins and nutrition. And that's what Healthy Addition is all about," Van Dyke said. "We're extremely proud that the program has had such good results."

Other successful BCBSF programs include a mammography screening promotion and flu shot campaign for senior citizens. "We believe these programs are a win-win situation for everyone," Van Dyke said. "They enable the people they serve to stay healthier. They enable us to cut health care costs, because we're reducing the likelihood of extended hospital stays. And they enable those who pay for health care coverage -- usually area businesses -- to save money, because such programs play a big role in keeping our premiums stable."

Another win-win situation is the fact that BCBSF is a long-time Tampa Bay resident. "We think it's essential to be part of the communities we serve," Van Dyke said. "The fact that we have employees who live and work here gives us an irreplaceable insight into what this area's particular health care needs are. And it enables us to do a truly thorough job of choosing area physicians and hospitals for our HMO and PPO programs."

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BCBSF recently identified two health care needs in the West Coast area and have implemented free, voluntary programs to help their HMO members who have asthma and diabetes. The Asthma Care Plus and Diabetes Care Plus programs are designed to help customers control their condition instead of having the illness control their lives. With the Asthma Care Plus program, customers attend training sessions, receive detailed materials about asthma, have an environmental assessment survey and receive current information and instruction on various asthma medications. The result? A better quality of life for those customers.

“Over the years, we’ve learned that good health care goes beyond merely focusing on medical aspects. It means understanding people’s social environment and meeting them where they are. And you can’t do that without experiencing that environment yourself. I truly believe that you can’t be a good neighbor if you aren’t part of the neighborhood. And I’m glad to be part of a company that feels the same way.”