From the Parish Nurse

Family Health History

Health care professionals have known for a long time that common diseases - heart disease, cancer, and diabetes - and rare diseases - like hemophilia, cystic fibrosis, and sickle cell anemia - can run in families. If one generation of a family has high blood pressure, it is not unusual for the next generation to have similarly high blood pressure. Tracing the illnesses suffered by your parents, grandparents, and other blood relatives can help your doctor predict the disorders to which you may be at risk and take action to keep you and your family healthy.

Americans know that family history is important to health. A recent survey found that 96 percent of Americans believe that knowing their family history is important. Yet, the same survey found that only one-third of Americans have ever tried to gather and write down their family's health history.

Because family health history is such a powerful screening tool, the Surgeon General has created a new computerized tool to help make it fun and easy for anyone to create a sophisticated portrait of their family's health. The Web-based tool helps users organize family history information and then print it out for presentation to their family doctor. In addition, the tool helps users save their family history information to their own computer and even share family history information with other family members.

Access the My Family Health Portrait Web tool at:

http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/portrait/index.html

Over the holidays or at other times when families gather, the Surgeon General encourages Americans to talk about, and to write down, the health problems that seem to run in their family. Learning about their family's health history may help ensure a longer, healthier future together.

For information on other activities of the Office of the Surgeon General, please visit: www.surgeongeneral.gov.

The content for this article was adapted from: http://www.hhs.gov/familyhistory/index.html