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Dozens of area community health leaders continue working tirelessly to improve the health of Cherokee County residents, while also standing as icons to other communities around the nation.

Members of the Cherokee County Community Health Coalition met at a local restaurant Tuesday morning to catch up on area activities and progressive efforts to offer the leaders abundant resources at the click of a button.

Paula Adams, of the Oklahoma State Department of Health, opened the meeting by detailing a just-released demographic and health data Web site, OK2SHARE, at www.health.ok.gov/ok2share.

"The data on this site has been collected to help communities plan programs more cost-effectively," said Adams. "The program is called Oklahoma Statistics on Health Available for Everyone, and gives health officials faster access to data."

The Web site provides officials a collection of statistics that can be broken down into each Oklahoma county. Adams said the data represents all health centers throughout the state, and visitors to the site can fill out a list of criteria to limit searches to leading causes of births and deaths, leading causes of cancer, and other important statistics.

"You could find out just about anything you wanted [on the Web site]," said Linda Axley, coalition chairwoman.

Adams thanked members for the work the community has put forth over the past few years.

"I've heard some really great stories on how this coalition is doing for health initiatives," Adams said, encouraging coalition members to visit the Web site and offer suggestions.

Lori Timmons, of NeoHealth, told the coalition audience the center is negotiating with two dentists and two physicians, but she could not release the names, as contracts have not been finalized.

"We hope to have dental open by the end of the year, if not sooner, and to have a full-time physician at the Tahlequah location, and a part-time physician at the Hulbert location," said Timmons.

The Health Center will host a grand opening Oct. 23.

Timmons told coalition members a new midwife, Sarah Craig, had joined the NeoHealth team, and would begin work Nov. 20.

Mike Pate, also of NeoHealth, said the center was gathering information to further the process of an Alzheimer's grant.

"The data will help us find a beneficial program for this area," said Pate.

Heather Winn, family and consumer science educator from the Cherokee County Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Office, said the Extension's education program has held two meetings recently to try and help residents with food allergies.

"We are going to have a lot of in-service training over the next few months," said Winn, who hopes to further educate those who, in turn, educate the community.

The Safe Kids Coalition was recently awarded a \$600 grant through a Chevy dealership car seat service, according to Lynne McAllister, chairwoman for Safe Kids.

The money will be used to purchase car seats to be given away during car seat checks.

“We also received \$5,000 from Cherokee Nation, which will be used to buy about 100 car seats for low-income families,” said McAllister.

McAllister told attendees Safe Kids will soon begin to expand its giveaway efforts into Adair County.

To increase tobacco use awareness, the Tobacco Use Prevention Committee will begin advertising on two area billboards to push residents into using committee’s help-line, according to Louise Micolites, chairwoman.

“We will have one in Spanish, and one in English and Cherokee,” said Micolites.

The committee’s efforts with SWAT - Students Working Against Tobacco - have been praised by state officials, according to Micolites, who said the committee has been given an opportunity to make a presentation on the program at a state conference.

“Together with Cherokee Nation, the state, the county and the city, we have this unique bond,” said Micolites. “That bond has led us to be invited to attend the [Center for Disease Control] to give a presentation. We feel very connected.”

A few area health centers have started giving flu shots, according to Axley, but the Cherokee County Health Department will not begin giving shots until Nov. 6.

“The Cherokee County Health Department has had no vaccine shipped in yet,” said Axley. “We anticipate no shortages this year, but the state has adopted different methods of releasing the vaccine, so it will just start arriving, which makes it hard to plan.”