

PATCH continues to support healthier communities

The issue of restoring local rights in Oklahoma communities came to its furthest point this legislative session. HB 2267 hoped to remove the pre-emptive clause that took away the rights of local communities to make healthy decisions through local ordinances. However, the effort missed its mark.

Many supporters of restoring local rights dealt with disappointment as HB 2267 was not considered to be heard in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee. With weeks of waiting to be placed on the agenda and much local support through letters and phone calls, the bill died for lack of due process in the Senate committee.

If the bill passed, local communities would have been able to make healthy decisions to protect their citizens and youth from secondhand smoke.

However, the work still continues. Pottawatomie Alliance Toward Community Health (PATCH) is a group of volunteers dedicated to the health of the community. PATCH members promote healthy choices and healthy lives, and they focus on changing social norms around tobacco throughout Pottawatomie County.

“Even though the bill has not passed, those of us trying to make a difference in the life of a child will not stop,” PATCH member Jennifer Birchett said. “I hope in the future that everyone will realize communities should have the right to decide what is best for its citizens.”

Oklahoma ranks 48th in the nation in health rankings, with high obesity rates and tobacco use significantly affecting citizens. Oklahoma citizens are encouraged to continue to contact his/her state representative and senator with issues related to improving the health of the state.

“We need to work together to continue to educate our legislators on ways that help our community improve health outcomes,” PATCH member Tina Johnson said. “By doing this, we not only improve the health of our citizens but we help our communities bring in new industry and more people interested in moving to our community.”

Local people create local change. Johnson recommends community members take part in community coalitions in his/her area to help make local communities a healthier place to live.

PATCH meets every first Wednesday of the month in The Doctor’s Building, 1414 N. Kennedy Suite 108, at noon. Lunch is provided. Contact Holly Gordon at (405) 275-3391 ext. 105 for more information.