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Program helps Dan River Region residents get medicine

By Tara Bozick

A new program gives hope to local residents choosing between either putting food on the table or buying life-sustaining prescription drugs.

“When I was working in the pharmacy, I saw a lot of people who couldn’t afford their medicines or skipped their medicines altogether,” said Pharmacy Connection specialist Mary Carman.

Pittsylvania County Community Action Inc.’s Pharmacy Connection, with \$67,700 in federal stimulus funding, partners with local pharmacies to help low-income and uninsured residents get long-term medicine for chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure or heart conditions, said Marsha Mendenhall, director of planning and budget for PCCA.

The program also helps with short-term medication like antibiotics for sickness, Mendenhall added. For that, residents get a voucher from a PCCA office and then go to a partner pharmacy.

So far, 16 residents finished the application process and the first batch of medicine goes out Monday, Carman said.

Kare Pharmacy in Sherwood Shopping Center in Danville and Gretna Drug in Gretna will receive the shipments of prescribed medicine and distribute them. Carman, a licensed pharmacy technician who started work with PCCA’s program in December, processes and labels the medicines and pharmacists verify them.

Residents fill out applications and submit the doctor’s prescriptions and documents verifying their income. PCCA then accesses a software program called The Pharmacy Connection through The Virginia Health Care Foundation, Mendenhall explained.

That software runs patients’ information and determines which assistance programs they qualify for to get free or low-cost prescription drugs, she said. After finishing the application process, residents receive their medicines in

three or six month supplies.

Patients pay a shipping and handling fee for the pharmacies and processing, but the highest a patient will ever pay is \$25 for a six-month supply of generic medicine, Carman said. For some medicines that cost \$200 a month, the program could mean savings of hundreds of dollars so that residents can then pay rent or other bills.

Many fixed income seniors skip medicine every other day to stretch out their prescriptions or may even skip three or six months a year after funding runs out, Mendenhall said.

“We decided this was one of the high needs in the area,” she said. “Health conditions affect the quality of anybody’s life and if they can get their medication and take it as prescribed then they can live life fuller.”

Everlena Ross, director of programs for PCCA, said that such medication is an essential element in preventive care and a necessity of life.

“Assuring that patients are able to comply with prescribed courses of medication improves the quality and the productivity of our citizens,” Ross said.

For more information on how to apply for prescription assistance through Pharmacy Connection, call Mary Carman at (434) 432-8071 or (434) 250-4905. Apply in-person at the PCCA office at 53 Depot St. in Chatham, Southside Community Action at 707 Piney Forest Road in Danville or Southside Community Action at 58 W. Church St. in Martinsville.

Fast facts

Pittsylvania County Community Action Inc. received \$668,000 in federal stimulus money allocated through the state for community action agencies. That will help the nonprofit offer Pharmacy Connection and four other programs for locals:

- Youth Enrichment, \$120,926, offers information on drugs and violence, gang prevention and parental responsibilities and reaches young people through sports camps, summer nutrition camps and recreation.
- Transportation, \$148,414, uses two new passenger vans to take clients to doctor’s appointments, help Project Discovery students visit college campuses or other PCCA activities.
- Consumer Education, \$68, 242, teaches skills like nutrition, parenting, family economics and resource management.
- Angel Food, \$18,870 helps seniors and low-income families by getting double the food for \$30 payments.

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