Every April during Organ Donor Awareness Month, UPMC celebrates the gift of life with its transplant recipients. Hugs are the order of the day as recipients return to thank those who cared for them and “parade” through the transplant units at UPMC Presbyterian and UPMC Montefiore, passing out treats and showing first-hand the meaning of organ donation. A transplant clinic planned for Altoona will save many patients several trips to Pittsburgh.
If you are not receiving Healthy Living Magazine in the mail and would like to, you need to join the Healthy Living Club. It’s FREE, and the magazine is just one of the many benefits!

Join online at UPMCAltoona.org or call 814-889-2630 or 1-888-313-4665.

When summer rolls around and the sun is shining, many turn frequently to cookouts for meal preparation. In most households, meat is incorporated into a majority of daily meals, especially grilled ones.

"In small amounts, meat can be an important part of a healthy diet," says Theresa Henry, RD, LDN, a UPMC Altoona clinical dietitian. "Meats provide needed nutrients, such as protein, iron, zinc, and B vitamins, but some meats have been linked to heart and cancer concerns."

Theresa says the type of meat best for each person’s diet can vary based on personal health concerns, but, in general, fish, shellfish, poultry without skin, and trimmed lean cuts of red meat, like round and loin, are the best choices.

Practice ‘meat moderation’
The healthiest thing to do, she says, is to eat your meat in moderation. Portion sizes should be limited to three ounces, about the size of a deck of cards, and portions of this size should only be included with one or two meals each day. Limit consumption of red meat to once or twice per week, and try to enjoy baked or grilled fish for several meals each week.

Theresa suggests thinking about your meal differently. “Make meat the side dish to complement the rest of your meal,” she said. “Include more grains and vegetables and try to think of those as your main course.”

When it comes to the cookout, something like a kebab can be a good, filling option if using smaller pieces of meat and more vegetables. However, how you cook your meat does matter.

Eating charred, well-done meat has been linked to an increased risk of cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. Theresa says turning down the heat when grilling, frying, or barbecuing to avoid excess burning or charring will lower that risk.

Try marinating before grilling
Marinating before grilling can also help protect meat and keep it from becoming dried out or charred. Processed meats also have ties to increased risks of disease and should be avoided when possible.

“They are often high in saturated fats, which are linked to heart disease,” Theresa says, “and it is thought that the process of salting, curing, and smoking processed meats can lead to the addition of carcinogens.”

Theresa encourages those wishing to cut back on meat to try substituting alternative proteins in daily meals. These could include eggs, beans, legumes, soy replacements, nuts, seeds, peanut butter, and low-fat dairy products, keeping in mind that fats should be of the heart-healthy variety and not saturated fats.

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**GRILLED-MEAT MARINADE**

This marinade reduces the carcinogenic effects of meat grilled at a high temperature:

- ½ cup rice vinegar or balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon dry mustard
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt

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Altoona emerging as a regional provider of UPMC’s world-class care

Transplant clinic planned by fall

The process of bringing to this area new medical services and the high quality medical care of UPMC is accelerating. July 1 will mark the one-year anniversary of Altoona Regional Health System’s merger with the world-renowned Pittsburgh health system that is rated No. 1 in Pennsylvania and No. 10 in the country in the prestigious U.S. News & World Report annual Honor Roll of America’s Best Hospitals.

UPMC Altoona President Jerry Murray says much progress is being made in the integration process, especially in important clinical areas.

“Significantly, we are transitioning to UPMC’s clinical quality initiatives and programs, toward a goal of making Altoona a hub for UPMC’s world-class care,” Jerry says. “This means people in our area will be able to access more-specialized medicine and advanced treatments closer to where they live.

World-class cancer treatment

“One of the best examples of that is our cancer center, whose integration into UPMC CancerCenter will bring to our region world-class cancer treatment, backed by best practices and leading-edge treatment procedures.”

UPMC CancerCenter’s partner is the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute — the region’s only Comprehensive Cancer Center designated by the National Cancer Institute.

UPMC Altoona has recruited a radiation oncologist to join Jack Schocker, MD, in its UPMC CancerCenter. Joshua Siglin, MD, is from UPMC’s residency program and will begin seeing patients here Aug. 1.

“This successful recruitment ends a lengthy search,” Jerry says, “and is directly attributable to our UPMC relationship.”

Another specialist, Elliott Bilofsky, DO, is joining UPMC Altoona’s medical staff July 1. This is another success that ends a lengthy search and can be credited to the UPMC affiliation. Dr. Bilofsky is an innovative ear-nose-throat, head and neck, facial plastic, and cosmetic surgeon at UPMC Bedford Memorial.

Joint expert joining Elite

And Adrian Clayton, DO, will join Elite Orthopedics of UPMC on Oct. 1. Of the orthopedic specialists on the staff at UPMC Altoona, Dr. Clayton is the only one to have completed a joint fellowship and is expected to be one of UPMC’s finest joint specialists. (Elite is UPMC Altoona’s orthopedic practice.)

By the end of this year, UPMC Altoona plans to have a transplant clinic established at Station Medical Center to serve all transplant patients in our region before and after their procedure. Patients will have surgery at UPMC in Pittsburgh, but the clinic will save them many trips to and from there for pre- and post-operative care.

“Patients needing transplants can be very sick,” Jerry says, “and this will be a great convenience for them.”

‘More exciting days ahead’

The transplant clinic will make significant use of telemedicine for doctors in Pittsburgh to evaluate patients here. That technology will also be employed in our ER and pediatrics unit within a year. It allows physicians to determine whether a trip to Pittsburgh is needed, reducing or eliminating unnecessary travel.

“A lot has happened and the best is yet to come,” Jerry says. “We have only scratched the surface. Health care in the Altoona area has many more exciting days ahead.”

UPMC Altoona’s many physician practices are moving toward an electronic medical record with a “one patient, one record” system. Wherever patients go in the UPMC system, their medical chart will be available instantly to their UPMC health care providers.

The enhancement also allows patients to sign up for MyUPMC, a FREE online tool that serves as a direct line of communication with their physician’s office.

MyUPMC allows patients to:
- Get advice securely from their physician
- Request appointments
- Renew prescriptions
- View test results and medical history
- Pay bills or ask billing questions
- Manage family health records
- Track chronic conditions
- Have online medical visits with UPMC AnywhereCare

Most practices should be offering MyUPMC by August. The practices include:
- Blair Medical Associates
- Mainline Medical Associates
- Elite Orthopedics of UPMC
- Allegheny Regional Surgical Associates
- Patton Family Medical Center

To watch a demonstration or sign up, please go to MyUPMC.com.

You can also call the MyUPMC Support Line at 1-866-884-8579 if you have any questions or need assistance.

“A lot has happened and the best is yet to come.”
It could be your heart...

Nausea, back pain, indigestion — all could be early signs of a heart attack

Heart attacks.
In movies, they are portrayed as sudden moments of excruciating pain, where the victim clutches his chest as he doubles over in agony. In real life, that’s not always the case.

“Heart attacks often begin slowly, as mild discomfort or insignificant pain,” explains George Jabbour, MD, of UPMC Altoona affiliate Blair Medical Associates-Cardiology. “We sometimes say heart attacks have ‘beginnings.’ There are things going on that you might not recognize as signs something bad is going to happen.”

Heart attacks continue to be the leading cause of death in the U.S., with 800,000 people dying annually. Research shows that 50 percent of those deaths happen outside of a hospital.

Get help quickly
Kristen Downs, RN, cardiac care coordinator at UPMC Altoona, is charged with educating people about the early symptoms and the real importance of getting help quickly.

“If people get to the hospital, they have a good chance of survival,” says Kristen. “Heart attacks don’t have to kill. Many deaths are preventable if you recognize the signs.”

So what indicates an impending problem? According to Dr. Jabbour, early symptoms can include:
- Nausea
- Pain that travels down one or both arms
- Fatigue
- Jaw, neck, or shoulder pain
- Feeling of anxiety and fear
- Chest pressure, discomfort, or “squeezing” in the center of chest
- Back pain
- Shortness of breath when performing normal activities
- Feeling of fullness

“You may or may not experience any or all of these,” he cautions. “Heart attacks present differently in each patient. The symptoms, or the ‘beginnings,’ can occur days or even weeks before the actual event.”

Better safe than sorry
For example, Dr. Jabbour says people sometimes mistake stomachaches, nausea, or indigestion without any obvious cause to a gastrointestinal problem.

“If you’ve been relying on antacids, antinausea medication, or other indigestion remedies for more than a few days, you need to get checked,” he says. “It could be your heart.”

One thing Dr. Jabbour and Kristen don’t want you to do is allow others to tell you that you’re overreacting, or that you should “just wait and see.”

“If you think you or someone you know is having a heart attack, or experiencing the ‘beginnings’ of one, seek help immediately,” Kristen says. “Don’t wait more than five minutes to call 911.”

“Truly, it’s better to be safe than sorry,” Dr. Jabbour adds. “This is the window of opportunity to prevent death and minimize heart damage.”
In late 2012, the UPMC Altoona Emergency Department (ED) began a process to improve the quality of care provided to sexual assault patients. Kim Corle, administrative nursing director of Emergency Services, who has coordinated the effort, calls the statistics “staggering.” “Every two minutes someone in the United States is sexually assaulted — more than 200,000 every year,” Kim says. “Initiating a well-coordinated response team and process will provide patients with evidence-based treatment and an initial step toward the healing process.”

Nurses part of team
Hospital staff members spearheading the project were leaders in a community-wide initiative to develop a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) for Central Pennsylvania. The team included the Altoona Police Department, Family Services Incorporated, the Greensburg Crime Lab, and the Blair County District Attorney’s office. These groups collaborated with the coordinator of forensic nursing services at Hillcrest Hospital of Cleveland Clinic to plan and lead education sessions. As a result, 18 UPMC Altoona nurses completed a multistep training program in August 2013 to become Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE).

SANE education focuses on classroom and clinical experiences to provide the nurse with forensic nursing science principles, specifically addressing the patient who has been sexually assaulted. The goal is to educate nurses in comprehensive care, documentation, evidence collection, referrals, and courtroom testimony. “We believe this will truly help us live out our mission in the community,” Kim says.

Effort leads to better reporting
The number of sexual assault victims treated at UPMC Altoona increased by 65 percent from 2012 to 2013. Kim believes these higher numbers do not reflect a higher rate of assault, but instead are an indication of better identification and reporting thanks to UPMC Altoona’s SANE-trained nurses and the Central Pennsylvania SART.

Jackie Bevan, victim services director at Family Services Inc., says the role of a SART is to provide comprehensive, compassionate care to victims of sexual assault. “Since the inception of the program and as a result of the training provided to the nurses in the Emergency Department, victims have received a much higher level of care from UPMC Altoona,” she says. “As we enhance our collective response to crimes of sexual violence in every step of the process, including collecting all evidence and asking the right questions, our hope is that Blair County will see an increased rate of prosecution and conviction.”

UPMC Altoona strives to have a SANE-trained nurse always available in the ED and has met this goal every month since October. In fact, UPMC Altoona now has more SANE-trained nurses than any other hospital in the UPMC system. “UPMC Altoona has been the driving force behind the creation of the Sexual Assault Response Team in Blair County,” Jackie says. “Without the determination of the ED, we would not be where we are today. It is clear they are genuinely concerned about the well-being of the patients they serve.”

What are SANEs?
Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are registered nurses who have completed specialized education and clinical preparation in the medical forensic care of the patient who has been a victim of sexual assault and abuse. These patients require expertise in physical assessment and advanced clinical skills. The SANE normally works with a collaborative, multidisciplinary group of professionals to develop a plan of care for the patient at discharge.

A component of the streamlined care the SANE can offer is the medical forensic examination. This exam can include the medical forensic history, a detailed physical and emotional assessment, written and photographic documentation of injuries, collection and management of forensic samples, and emotional and social support and resources.

Nurses also can testify in any legal proceedings related to the examination and oversee proper chain of custody and integrity of the samples so the evidence will be admissible in court.

— From the International Association of Forensic Nurses website

Nurse is always available
UPMC Altoona strives to have a SANE-trained nurse always available in the ED and has met this goal every month since October. In fact, UPMC Altoona now has more SANE-trained nurses than any other hospital in the UPMC system. “UPMC Altoona has been the driving force behind the creation of the Sexual Assault Response Team in Blair County,” Jackie says. “Without the determination of the ED, we would not be where we are today. It is clear they are genuinely concerned about the well-being of the patients they serve.”

Beverly Hirchak, RN, is one of 18 nurses specially trained to examine victims of sexual assault at UPMC Altoona.
I was desperate…

His money running out, ill Tyrone man finds UPMC Altoona clinic

William Light of Tyrone is just the kind of person Zane Gates, MD, had in mind when he started his free clinic for the uninsured in the back of a van almost 20 years ago.

“Willie,” as Mr. Light likes to be called, is diabetic and had a mild heart attack in 2001. He’d lost his job and paid $400 a month for health insurance, but he says he couldn’t keep that up much longer.

“I was desperate,” he says. “I was to the point where I couldn’t pay anymore.”

Then his wife, Kay, heard about Dr. Gates’ clinic, Partnering for Health Services. By that time the clinic had moved to its current site at 501 Howard Ave., Suite B204. The clinic is part of UPMC Altoona, which gives patients access to a host of doctors who specialize in a range of fields from cardiology to women’s health.

Receives diet counseling

Willie sees Dr. Gates every five to six weeks. In addition to Dr. Gates, Willie meets with a registered dietitian at the clinic for counseling on proper nutrition for his medical conditions.

“Dr. Gates understands my circumstances,” Willie says.

“He’s probably taken better care of me than any other physician I’ve ever had.”

According to Dr. Gates, the care Willie gets at the clinic is what patients should expect at every primary care doctor’s office. The care is based on a few key principles, including the removal of insurance from the office.

By removing insurance from the clinic, doctors and nurses are not spending their time filling out forms, which allows them more time with the patient.

Dr. Gates says doctors and nurses can establish relationships with patients, getting to know them and their families. This leads to better responses on the part of patients when it comes to things like taking medication and following proper diets.

It’s about people…

“What this clinic has taught me is that it’s about the people, and that’s how you’re going to fix health care,” Dr. Gates says. “You must learn to listen to the people and the problems people have.”

When Dr. Gates first opened his clinic, he got help from some doctors and nurses in the area who came out of retirement, including Robert Bridenbaugh, MD. It just so happened Dr. Bridenbaugh saw his former nurse, Kaye Bouslough, in the grocery store and recruited her to work at the clinic.

She joined eight retired RNs, LPNs, and medical secretaries who volunteer at the clinic, says Michelle Adams, clinical manager.

“The volunteers bring a wealth of knowledge from their prior jobs,” Michelle says.

No insurance forms

Kaye, who lives in Hollidaysburg, says she really appreciates not having to fill out the insurance forms, which she says does give her more time to spend with patients.

“People don’t realize how much time it takes to fill out those forms,” she says.

As with Willie, just about all of the clinic’s patients are pleased with the services they receive at the clinic, Kaye says.

“They’re so happy to have access to all the different specialists,” she says.

About the clinic

More than 5,000 people in central Pennsylvania have received medical help from the Partnering for Health Services clinic since it opened.

The clinic, which is for patients ages 18 to 65, provides primary health care to people who usually don’t seek medical help because they can’t afford it, says Michelle Adams, clinical manager. Often, people who don’t have health insurance avoid preventive care because of the cost, she says. She added that our area also lacks enough health care providers who treat the uninsured.

By providing free clinics for the uninsured, the patients benefit because they gain access to medical care, says Zane Gates, MD. Hospitals save on costs because their emergency rooms don’t see as many sick patients. He has also developed an innovative hospital insurance plan for people who earn too much for free care but cannot afford private insurance.

Many of the patients who come to the clinic have jobs — about 55 percent — but they don’t have health insurance through their employers, Michelle says. People must meet specific income guidelines before they’re accepted as patients at the clinic. For example, for a family of four, the limit to be eligible for free care at the clinic is $47,700 annually.

Patients at the clinic also receive a variety of prescription medications. A pharmacist is on site to answer questions and provide counseling.

According to Michelle, more people have needed the clinic in recent years. In Blair County alone, 13 percent of the population was at or below poverty level from 2008 to 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The median household income for the same period was $42,687.

“You must learn to listen to the people and the problems people have.”

Willie with Dr. Gates
News from the UPMC Altoona Foundation

Law enforcement agencies receive lifesaving AEDs

UPMC Altoona Foundation became aware of the need for lifesaving automatic external defibrillators (AEDs) in Blair County through the work of UPMC Altoona’s Emergency Department.

Matthew Bouchard, MD, chairman of Emergency Medicine, and Shaun Sheehan, DO, approached the foundation about this urgent health need in our community. The foundation responded by donating 25 AEDs to law enforcement agencies countywide, according to President Tim Balconi.

Dr. Sheehan, in his role as UPMC Altoona’s director of Pre-Hospital Services, was instrumental as the liaison with area law enforcement in defining the need for equipment and training to assist victims of sudden cardiac arrest. Often, a police officer is first on the scene of a cardiac emergency. The availability of a trained officer with an AED can be the difference between life and death.

In addition to hospital police and the Blair County Sheriff’s Department, the foundation is donating AEDs to police in Williamsburg, Greenfield Township, Duncansville, Roaring Spring, Tyrone, Martinsburg, Freedom Township, Blair Township, Logan Township, Hollidaysburg, and the City of Altoona.

“UPMC Altoona is grateful for the cooperation of all local law enforcement agencies and the Blair County 911 Center for participating in this important lifesaving project,” says UPMC Altoona President Jerry Murray. “Grants like this from our foundation are an expression of our commitment to the health and well-being of all residents of Blair County.” All funds raised at the UPMC Altoona Foundation are used to support UPMC Altoona and the community’s health needs.

Guardian Angel program honors excellence

Pam Adler, RNC, Jennifer Eger, RN, both of Maternity, and Connie Wiggins, RN from Surgical Progressive Care, were the first Guardian Angels for the new patient-driven employee recognition program created by the UPMC Altoona Foundation.

The three were nominated by patients who wanted to recognize them for excellent care. The Guardian Angel program encourages patients to nominate anyone who helped make their hospital stay a positive experience. The program is in response to patients asking for a way to acknowledge the excellence of physicians, staff, and volunteers. Awardees receive a Guardian Angel lapel pin to signify their accomplishment.

No donation is necessary to make a nomination.

Blair Gastro donates equipment for infusion therapy unit

Blair Gastroenterology Associates has donated eight new infusion therapy chairs and several iPads® for patient use at UPMC Altoona’s Medical Outpatient Services.

The physicians at Blair Gastroenterology refer many patients to Medical Outpatient Services, known as MOPS, for infusion therapy. MOPS nurse manager Lori Shelow, RN, made the need for new chairs known to Ralph McKibbin, MD, and his partners through the UPMC Altoona Foundation.

“We have a commitment in common with UPMC Altoona to our patients and the community,” Dr. McKibbin says, “and we are delighted to assist the foundation in obtaining the latest infusion therapy chairs for the care and comfort of our mutual patients.”

It was the doctors’ compassion and understanding of what infusion therapy entails that led them to make this major gift for the care and comfort of patients, according to Tim Balconi, foundation president.

Patients in the unit can spend from three to six hours receiving medical infusion treatments, Lori says, so the chairs and iPads will mean a better patient treatment experience.

“The foundation thanks all the doctors and staff members at Blair Gastroenterology Associates,” Tim says.

“Their compassion and support will make patients healthier and more comfortable while having treatment.”

Dr. McKibbin’s associates at Blair Gastroenterology are Lance DeFrancisco, MD; Rajih Alkhafaji, MD; Bran Dodson, Ronald Branza, MD; Todd Stull, MD; Edmond Bouassa, MD, and David Kerstetter, MD. The practice provides a full range of gastroenterology treatments.

Mallory trust supports deaf, hard-of-hearing youths

The UPMC Altoona Foundation, through the Ethel Mallory trust, has donated iTunes® gift cards to the Mallory Speech and Hearing Clinic for software to help deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Ethel Mallory was a local woman who was hard of hearing from a young age. When she died in 1979, she created a trust specifically for “the care of children or young people who may be deaf or hard of hearing.”

The trust’s grants go to the foundation, which uses them to support the mission.

The clinic will use this year’s gift to buy software for iPads® that were donated through the trust last year.

Tim Balconi, foundation president, says the Mallory trust has been quietly helping the community for decades. Last year, the trust purchased special computer notebooks and programs to assist speech pathologists and their patients.

Earlier this year, the foundation donated 16 digital hearing screening machines to seven Blair County school districts to promote hearing health among children and youth. The $16,000 cost was provided by the Mallory trust to the foundation.

School nurses use the digital hearing screening machines to examine public and private school children in pre-kindergarten, third, seventh, and 11th grades.

Couple donates to help sex assault victims

Judi and Irv Seltzer of Duncansville learned of the special needs of sexual assault victims during a tour of the UPMC Altoona Emergency Department, then made a major gift to support these patients’ comfort and care.

Matt Bouchard, MD, chair of Emergency Medicine, and Kim Corle, ER administrative director, led the tour and discussed the needs with the couple.

The Seltzers also provided funding for a new family gathering room in the Emergency Department that will give patients’ families a place to confer with medical staff in comfort and privacy.

“The UPMC Altoona Foundation is proud to recognize and thank the Seltzers for their concern for patients,” foundation President Tim Balconi says, “and for the gifts to improve the care of patients and families who are confronted with very difficult circumstances.

“The Seltzers are a dynamic force for good in our community.”

Irv is a prominent businessman who has owned Modern Communication Corp., Manpower, and numerous local commercial properties. He is a licensed attorney and a 57-year member of the Rotary Club of Altoona, where he has served as past district governor. Irv is also past chairman of the board of the Greater Altoona Economic Development Corp. and a member of the Blair County Chamber of Commerce.

Judi’s interests after retiring from M&T Bank include Art in Common, a group of artists that supports the Blair County Arts Festival. Judi also is a board member of Friends of the Altoona Public Library and member of the Women’s Club of Altoona.

At the presentation of the Donna Y. Deichert Scholarship were (from left) Chris Rickens, chief nursing officer; Kiersten Zelnosky, recipient; Michelle Dodson, development associate and events coordinator for the foundation, and Jacques Strawser, director of Critical Care.

At the AED presentation in April were (left to right): front — police chiefs Rowdy C. Kagarise, Jeffer; Ketner, James E. Ott, Ronald A. Givler, Milton R. Fields, and Roger White; back — Mr. Balconi, Rob Holbritter, foundation board president; Neil Port, foundation board member; Sgt. Mike Zubinsky of UPMC Altoona Police, Chief Paul Blanchard, Dr. Bouchard, Dr. Sheehan, and Rich Consiglio, Blair county district attorney.

At the presentation of the Donna Y. Deichert Scholarship were (from left) Ralph McKibbin, MD, Rajih Alkhafaji, MD, David Kerstetter, MD, and Lance DeFrancisco, MD, all of Blair Gastroenterology Associates.

Nurse manager awarded scholarship

Kiersten Zelnosky, RN, ATCN, CCRN is this year’s winner of the Donna Y. Deichert Scholarship.

Each year, the scholarship is awarded to a nurse working on a bachelor’s or other advanced degree in nursing. Kiersten is pursuing her bachelor’s in nursing science. She has been with the hospital since 1987 and is nurse manager for Cardiothoracic ICU and Surgical Trauma ICU.

Donna worked for many years in the Intensive Care Unit at Altoona Hospital. In recognition of her passion for nursing, her family established a permanent endowment at the UPMC Altoona Foundation in her name.
What is the Healthy Blair County Coalition?
Coleen — The Healthy Blair County Coalition (HBCC) is a partnership of individuals and organizations working to promote the social, economic, emotional, and physical well-being of you, your family, your friends, your neighbors.

How was it formed?
Kevin — In 2007, the Blair County Human Services Office and United Way of Blair County invited other key community leaders to join an effort to conduct a countywide, scientific health needs assessment. That assessment became the most complete analysis of crime, alcohol and drug abuse, economic issues, and health care concerns affecting county residents.

The group then implemented goals and strategies that were developed to address those challenges, and the Healthy Blair County Coalition was born. In 2012, a second community health needs assessment was conducted. The results are outlined in the report “Blair County Profile II: Community Health Needs Assessment.”

What specific problems did the coalition’s survey identify?
Coleen — We are addressing the most critical needs, which include obesity, physical inactivity, smoking and tobacco use, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, mental health needs of children and adolescents, and poverty.

How is the coalition addressing the problems it has uncovered?
Kevin — Space is insufficient here to list all the ways, but here are some:

We are addressing obesity and physical inactivity by encouraging the addition of health and wellness into every aspect of community life, including collaborating with the Blair County Chamber of Commerce to create a workplace wellness committee and planning a Let’s Move Blair County event.

For alcohol and other substance abuse, we are exploring options for screening for substance abuse during routine health care.

To address smoking and tobacco use, we are exploring options for implementing policies and programs that promote a smoke-free community (e.g. smoke-free workplaces, clean indoor ordinances, smoking cessation programs, etc.).

A work group has been formed to gather data and address gaps in mental health services for children/adolescents. And strategies to combat poverty include educating the community on the impact of poverty, while empowering people in poverty with the resources or tools to become self-sufficient.

What if I wanted to become involved with HBCC?
Coleen — Individuals can join the coalition or serve on work groups. Organizations are invited to help advertise and support HBCC events and programs, and provide funding.

Kevin — Since 2012, all hospitals have been required by the Affordable Care Act to conduct a community health needs assessment every three years and develop a plan to meet those needs. However, coalition members see this as an opportunity to assess and impact all aspects of a “healthy Blair County,” so we encourage people from all segments of the community to participate. A healthy Blair County means impacting social, economic, emotional, and physical needs of residents and the community itself.

Assessing Blair County
Blair County ranked 51 out of 67 counties in the state, according to the 2014 County Health Rankings Report, with 32 percent of the adult population considered obese, and 31 percent of K-6 students and 33 percent of students in grades 7-12 considered overweight or obese.

Survey results indicate that alcohol and other substance abuse is as critical an issue as unemployment. In 2012, the death rate from heart disease was 244.4 per 100,000 people, much higher than Pennsylvania’s rate of 194.

Twenty-three percent of the adult population smoke every day or most days, and cancer is the second-leading cause of death. The estimated poverty rate is 13.3 percent.

Blair County has the fifth most active mental health crisis center in Pennsylvania for volume of patients served.

With Kevin Hockenberry, UPMC Altoona representative on the Healthy Blair County Coalition, and Coleen Heim, coalition director.