

Men in Butte prerelease receiving medical care

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Men at Connections, the Butte prerelease program, are receiving medical care and education about men's reproductive health, thanks to a \$48,861 grant. The grant will be used to work with men involved in the Community Counseling and Correctional Service programs for the next 12 months, said Barbara Mueske, director of Family Services at the Butte Silver Bow Health Department.

The grant was made by the Regional Family Planning Office in Denver in early November and was part of a special grant initiative received through the Montana Family Planning office.

Mueske said that she applied for the grant because she saw a gap in programs focusing on men's reproductive health. "Men's reproductive health has not had very much attention at all," she said.

Mueske said the program focuses primarily on education — giving male participants information about pregnancy prevention, cancer, screening through testicular self-examination and the transmission and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs.

Mueske said that although teen pregnancy rates are down, STDs are on the rise.

"That tells us that people are practicing contraception, but not safe sex," she said. "STDs are now the number one contagious disease in the country," said Mueske, listing genital warts caused by the human papillomavirus, genital herpes and chlamydia as the most common types of STDs.

"Chlamydia is the number one STD in the nation and in Butte," said Mueske. Chlamydia is a sexually transmitted bacteria that, if left untreated, can lead to sterility in both men and women. Mueske said that both gonorrhea and syphilis are on the rise, as well as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. "Hepatitis C in the correctional population is just rampant," she said.

Mueske said that the new grant program provides testing for gonorrhea and chlamydia, and clients who have engaged in risky behaviors are referred to the health department for further testing for other STDs.

Clients choosing to participate in the grant program work with nurses from CCCS and local physician Pat McGree, a family practitioner at the Rocky Mountain Clinic in Butte. McGree said that male reproductive health can be a touchy subject, and most men in the program are generally hesitant to talk about that particular aspect of their anatomy at first. "They are probably more embarrassed than anything," he said. Once the conversation is initiated, things start to change.

"A lot of them are kind of relieved. They do have a lot of questions," added McGree. Those questions often reveal worries about cancer and other diseases and infections.

Statistics show that men are less likely to address their health concerns. "It's probably cultural-kind of a macho thing," said McGree.

Despite the traditional avoidance of the topic, McGree said the program seems to be well received. "My assumption is that if they keep coming, they're accepting it pretty well," he said.

Mueske said that overall; the Butte Family Planning Clinic has a 16 percent participation rate by men, which is much higher than the 4 percent state average. Mueske said that the increased participation by men in these programs is due to the health department's focus on prevention and aggressive education programs. "We have been out there educating men and talking to men," she said.