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Promoting a healthier Sarasota County through collaboration

Over 200 people attended the 2008 Community Health Interactive today, April 16 at the Chelsea Center where they shared ideas about how to collaborate to create a healthier Sarasota County. Those in attendance engaged in a lively discussion around three priority health issues in our community: increasing access to healthcare, improving chronic disease management, and encouraging active, healthy lifestyles. As a follow up to today's event, several mini-grants will be awarded to help organizations that were represented at the workshop to strengthen the impact of their programs through collaboration.

The event, a project of the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP), was led by Donna Petersen, MPH, SCD, Dean of University of South Florida's College of Public Health. "This was a starting point to help us understand how to best connect like-minded groups and encourage collaborative efforts to create a healthier Sarasota County," said Dr. Peterson. There are many active groups in Sarasota County working on similar issues and have common goals to improve health in our community. "When groups collaborate, that work has the potential to make a greater impact, while being more innovative, and more responsive to the needs of the community," said Kari Ellingstad, MPH, research coordinator with the Community Health Improvement Partnership who worked with sponsors and community leaders to coordinate the event.

Some people may view a healthy community as one with quality healthcare options, low disease rates, and plenty of opportunities to be active. To others, it is a place with thriving community gardens or a high-tech system for sharing health information. Through its Health System Collaboration Committee, CHIP is working to foster community connections to promote health. Recently, the committee joined with members of The Community Alliance of Sarasota County to identify three key health priority areas as needing more community attention and action: increasing access to healthcare, improving chronic disease management, and encouraging active, healthy lifestyles. The Community Health Interactive is an important first step to more effectively address these issues.

Today's forum was jointly sponsored by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, and the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice. The Community Alliance of Sarasota County, the Sarasota County Health Department, Sarasota County Wellness Coalition, Sarasota Memorial Hospital, SCOPE, the South County Family YMCA and the University of South Florida College of Public Health were also involved in the planning for the event.

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The Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP) is a community-led effort to improve the health of Sarasota County residents. CHIP also works with Charlotte and DeSoto counties to foster change in health systems across the region. CHIP is funded by the Gulf Coast Community Foundation of Venice, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, the Sarasota County Health Department, Sarasota County Government, Doctors Hospital, DeSoto County Health Department, DeSoto Memorial Hospital, Sarasota Memorial Healthcare System, Venice Regional Medical Center, Peace River Regional Medical Center, Fawcett Memorial Hospital, and Englewood Community Hospital and Charlotte Regional Medical Center.

For more information, call Kari Ellingstad, MPH, at 941-861-2867 or visit the CHIP website at www.CHIP4health.org.

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