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The Seward County Health Department is in the process of conducting a health needs assessment and needs the community's help in the collecting of data. A survey has been entered online through Survey Monkey and is currently available at many locations throughout Liberal as well. Courtesy photo

By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

The Seward County Health Department is looking for assistance from local residents to help the facility better meet the needs of its clientele.

The SCHD is in the process of conducting a health needs assessment, the purpose of which is to find out the health needs of the community and to begin to address them.

“Overall, the kind of data we’re looking for is health priorities and needs in Seward County,” said SCHED dietitian Susan Lukwago. “That’s the bottom line.”

Lukwago said a survey was developed by a committee of community members, and she said this allows the health department to get information from people living in Seward County rather than making guesses about the data.

“The data specifically is input from people regarding our health needs and what priorities to address,” she said.

Lukwago, along with SCHED Administrator Martha Brown and nurses Charly Madden and Leticia Arredondo, recently attended a training provided by the Kansas Health Institute in Garden City on how to conduct health needs assessments.

The training, included how to conduct assessments, and Lukwago said health facilities can either do primary or secondary data collection. Seward County’s health department has chosen to go with the primary method, which includes surveys.

Lukwago said there are other methods to gather data besides surveys.

“You can also do focus groups,” she said. “You can do interviews with people. We’re starting with surveys because we found that one of the ways we can hopefully get a lot of information from a lot of people so that it will be representative of our county.”

At the Garden City training, Lukwago said the group also learned that the committees that develop surveys need to represent many different sectors of a community, and that is exactly what Seward County’s has.

“We’ve got a commissioner,” she said. “We’ve got law enforcement. We’ve got people from the bank, church, business, the hospital that helped us put this together. We met three times, put together the survey, gave it to them, looked at the questions, had them look at it again and then also had it translated into Spanish.”

Print versions were available at the recently completed Seward County Five State Fair, and Madden said others will now be accessible around town.

“The different people that are on our committee will be putting it out at their places if they want a paper survey,” she said. “The bank, they were going to try to put it on the time and temp line at First National Bank. We’re going to do the Kismet Little World’s Fair in September.”

Lukwago said copies of the survey will likewise be at Stepping Stone Shelter.

“Both the print copy and the link is available in Spanish as well,” she said.

The survey is accessible online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SewardCountyEnglish2013> and [www.surveymonkey.com /s/SewardCountySpanish2013](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SewardCountySpanish2013).

Lukwago said as surveys are returned, Seward County’s population will be analyzed, and she gave examples of what will be looked at.

“Let’s say it’s 49 percent women and 51 percent men,” she said. “It has this percentage that are over 60 years old and this many that are this age and in terms of income. As we start to get it back, the different ranges of income, we will start to look at the demographics and to see is what we’re receiving comparing to what the population of Seward County is. If we get them back and it looks like we should have 60 percent of individuals of Hispanic descent and we get the surveys back, of the 1,000, only 25 percent are people of Hispanic descent, then we will need to do whatever extra to get that percentage.”

Lukwago said she believes a health needs survey is a necessary step for the health department.

“We cannot presume to meet the needs of our community without knowing what they are,” she said. “Hopefully, this will inform us of that.”

The assessment is also a step toward accreditation for the health department.

“A bunch of the counties in our area have already completed it,” she said. “The hospital also did a needs assessment. Our information will be complementary rather than contradictory.”

Madden said once the assessment is finalized, it will be published.

“We’re going to collect information through Sept. 15,” Lukwago said. “After that, we put it in, analyze it and get a committee to help set the priorities.”

Lukwago said at the latest, data would be entered by the end of October, and priorities would be looked at by the end of 2013.

“We planned on our timeline that we’ve written out for us by the end of December to have the health assessment and write up done,” she said.

Lukwago said SCHED would then develop a Community Health Improvement Plan, which comes out of the assessment.

“I say it should all be finalized hopefully by the end of April,” Madden said.

The information gathered from the assessment would also help better inform the health department's clientele about the services the facility provides.

"The people we're gathering information from are the people that we serve," Lukwago said.

Lukwago added Southwest Medical Center conducts a health needs assessment every three years, while SCHED conducts its assessment every five years.

Madden said everyone is encouraged to fill out the survey.

"We want to hear what everybody has to say are the needs in our community and ways that maybe we could work on those or improve them," she said.

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