

## **Multidisciplinary Head and Neck Cancer Prevention Initiative at Mollie Wheat Memorial Health Clinic**

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### **Project Description**

Head and neck cancer remains a significant health concern in rural Indiana, where high tobacco use, limited access to specialty care, and lack of preventive services contribute to delayed diagnosis and poorer outcomes. This project will provide a multidisciplinary head and neck cancer prevention initiative in conjunction with Oral Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week (April 16-22). The program combines free cancer screening, prevention services, and interprofessional education to improve early detection and reduce risk factors in a medically underserved rural population.

This initiative builds upon successful screening events held in 2024 and 2025 and aims to establish a sustainable annual prevention program in the Wabash Valley region.

### **Target Population**

Mollie R. Wheat Memorial Clinic serves Terre Haute and surrounding rural communities in western Indiana. Terre Haute has a poverty rate of approximately 17% compared to the national average of 12.4%. Tobacco use in the region approaches 24%, exceeding both state and national averages. Access to specialty care is limited, with approximately one otolaryngologist serving more than 58,000 individuals within a 60-mile radius.

Mollie Wheat Memorial Clinic serves approximately 400 patients annually, with approximately 97% uninsured or enrolled in Medicaid. These barriers place patients at increased risk for delayed diagnosis and limited access to preventive care. This project specifically targets uninsured and underinsured adults who are at increased risk for head and neck cancer due to tobacco use, alcohol use, and limited access to preventive services.

### **Methods**

#### *Phase I - Educational In-Service*

An interprofessional educational session will be conducted at Indiana University School of Medicine prior to the screening event. Otolaryngologists, dentists, and oncology providers will lead instruction for approximately 25 medical and dental students.

The session will include:

- Training in head and neck cancer screening techniques
- Education on risk factors including tobacco use and HPV infection
- Discussion of rural healthcare disparities
- Instruction on tobacco cessation counseling
- Overview of multidisciplinary head and neck cancer care

This training prepares future healthcare providers to recognize and prevent head and neck cancer in rural populations.

#### *Phase II - Community Prevention and Screening Event*

A free oral, head, and neck cancer screening event will be held at Mollie Wheat Memorial Clinic during Oral Head & Neck Cancer Awareness Week. Patients will receive:

- Comprehensive oral and head and neck cancer screening
- Education about cancer prevention
- Free HPV vaccination for eligible uninsured adults
- Tobacco cessation counseling

- Nicotine replacement therapy when appropriate
- Assistance with insurance enrollment
- Dental referrals when needed

Approximately 40 patients are expected to be screened during the event. Medical and dental students will assist providers with screenings, patient education, and follow-up coordination under physician supervision. Each participant will receive a head and neck cancer prevention toolkit including:

- Educational materials on cancer prevention
- SPF lip balm and sunscreen
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, and floss
- Information on tobacco cessation resources

### Phase III - Community Outreach

Educational materials and prevention toolkits will also be distributed at a local community health fair following the screening event. This outreach will extend cancer prevention education beyond the clinic setting and allow engagement with individuals who may not otherwise seek medical care. Approximately 200 prevention toolkits are expected to be distributed through the screening event and community outreach activities.

### **Expected Outcomes**

Expected measurable outcomes include:

- 40 community members screened for head and neck cancer
- 200 prevention toolkits distributed
- 8-12 HPV vaccinations administered
- 25 medical and dental trainees educated
- 8-12 tobacco cessation enrollments
- Increased awareness of head and neck cancer risk factors

### **Expected Impact**

This project emphasizes both primary and secondary cancer prevention. Primary prevention will occur through HPV vaccination, tobacco cessation counseling, and community education. Secondary prevention will occur through early detection during screening. This initiative will improve access to preventive care in a medically underserved rural community while training future physicians and dentists to recognize and prevent head and neck cancer. By establishing a sustainable annual prevention program, this project has the potential to serve as a model for similar rural clinics.

### **Estimated Cost**

Prevention toolkits (educational materials, oral hygiene supplies, SPF products): \$600

Outreach tabling materials (folding table, tablecloth, clinic referral cards): \$150

Screening supplies (gauze, tongue depressors, pen lights): \$100

Total Estimated Cost: \$850

Remaining funds will be used to support our continued prevention and outreach efforts in the coming years.

### **Conclusion**

This multidisciplinary cancer prevention initiative will provide critical screening and prevention services to an underserved rural population while training future healthcare providers in head and neck cancer prevention. By combining free screening, HPV vaccination, tobacco cessation support, and community education, this program addresses major risk factors for head and neck cancer in a high-risk population. Funding from the American Head and Neck Society Cancer Prevention Community Service Award will support the continued development of a sustainable head and neck cancer prevention program serving the Wabash Valley community.