

Mercy forum helps women religious live healthy lives

Some 180 sisters of 13 different religious communities listened to experts speak about the topic “Taking charge of your health and wellness,” in the lobby of the Weinberg Center for Women’s Health and Medicine at Mercy Medical Center, Baltimore, Jan. 27.

During the forum the sisters were educated on five different topics: gynecologic health, exercising the mind and body, keeping your bones strong, prevention and detection of colon cancer, and breast health.

“Our thought behind this event was these are women that take care of others,” said Amy Freeman with executive services at Mercy. “They need a day to think of their own wellbeing.”

Dr. Neil Rosenshein, director of the Gynecologic Oncology Center, spoke about ovarian cancer, how to prevent it and risk factors that women of all ages should be aware of. Some of the sisters were concerned about cysts and if they can cause cancer. Dr. Rosenshein said a cyst does not necessarily mean cancer. The sisters also asked questions about menopause, hormone replacement drugs and cervical cancers.

It is helpful to listen to the latest in research findings from those who have dedicated so much time to their expertise, said Ms. Freeman.

Dr. Kathy Helzlsouer, director of the Prevention and Research Center, Susan Appling, C.R.N.P., and Maureen McBeth, a physical therapist in the Center for Restorative Therapy discussed the path to wellness. On this path Dr. Helzlsouer touched on acute and chronic stress and the effects it has on a person’s body. Self care, she said, requires relaxation, physical activity, nutrition, and attitudes and belief.

Ms. Appling urged the sisters to find a healthy balance between diet and their lifestyle. She spoke about different kinds of fat, what types of foods people should be

eating and increasing fiber intake.

"It's not all about deprivation," said Ms. Appling. "Portion sizes have changed in the last 20 years, which means you are getting more calories and you need more exercise to burn them off."

The healthy way to lose weight is one pound per week because it took a long time to put the weight on it should take about the same time to take it off, said Ms. Appling. Ms. McBeth spoke to the sisters about the kind of exercise that should be done on a daily basis and how to reduce the chance of a fall.

"Most of us don't get enough exercise," said Ms. McBeth. "Walking is my favorite exercise to recommend."

When it comes to keeping bones healthy, women need to recognize when they are at risk, said Dr. Errol Rushovich, director of the Center for Bone Health and Division of Endocrinology. He urged the group to get more calcium in their diets and to read the labels on their supplement bottles to make sure they are getting the right dosage.

"Vitamin D intake is almost if not more important than calcium," said Dr. Rushovich. "Discuss the timing of bone density with your providers."

According to Dr. Debra Vachon, director of the Colon and Rectal Center, "colon cancer is an equal opportunity disease. However, the good news is that over all for the first time, this year colon cancer is declining just a little."

Dr. Vachon said early detection of colon cancer means that it may be more curable. She explained that colon cancer comes from polyps that form and it's possible to have them without getting cancer. Everyone is at risk, but risk increases as people age.

People should be screened every 10 years even if they have no symptoms or family history, said Dr. Vachon. There are no symptoms for colon cancer until the late warning signs set in.

"If you have a family history of polyps, you should get checked more often than every 10 years," said Dr. Vachon.

Before the women began lunch, they were given one more important talk by Dr. Neil Friedman, director of the Hoffberger Breast Center. He said one in eight women will develop breast cancer, but the mortality rate for breast carcinoma has decreased 2.3 percent every year from 1990 to 2002.

“Early detection of breast cancer absolutely saves lives,” said Dr. Friedman who urged women over 40 to get a yearly mammogram.