

3rd Annual North Texas Health Forum focuses on Infant Mortality

Infant mortality has long been recognized as a significant problem in areas of Tarrant County, Texas, where more babies die each year than in almost any other county in the United States. According to the Fort Worth Commission for Women, researchers believe that birth outcomes are a culmination of women's health throughout their lives, and by improving women's health overall, we can lower infant mortality in Fort Worth and beyond. Some of the critical elements highlighted by experts in the battle against infant mortality include education, nutrition, stress reduction and preconception health.

These were among the key issues presented at this year's third annual North Texas Health Forum, held April 8 and 9, 2010, at the Fort Worth Community Arts Center and sponsored by the UNTHSC School of Public Health (SPH).

This community event, titled "**Reducing Infant Mortality in Tarrant County: It's Time for Action,**" featured both national speakers and local panelists in its exploration of the root causes of infant mortality in our community. Its purpose was to join a wide variety of community members together to design workable solutions for change.

A record-breaking, capacity attendance of more than 200 guests participated in each day of the event, representing a wide cross-section of the Fort Worth/Dallas region, including community members, professional and civic leaders, health services executives, government officials, public health and non-profit professionals, faith leaders, faculty, students, alumni and other community stakeholders interested in this critical topic.

Attendees explored a Life Course model for change that has been successful in other areas of the United States and has great potential for Tarrant County residents. The Life Course Perspective uses an approach developed in the 1960s for analyzing people's lives from birth through adulthood, to understand how early events and influences affect health and other issues, in this case, the occurrence of infant mortality among certain communities and populations.

The Forum featured keynote speaker Audra D. Robertson, MD, MPH, instructor for the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Boston. Since 2008, she has also served as Clinical and Research Director for The Birth Equity Initiative, a program to eliminate racial disparities in infant mortality through the Center for Community Health and Health Equity at Brigham and Women's. The goal of this initiative is to design and implement a collaborative, clinical-based, and community-based intervention program to address these disparities in the Boston area.

Tamara Wrenn, MA, CCE, CIMT, was also featured as a guest speaker. A senior consultant for Practice Matters Consulting Firm and founder and executive director of *Just Us Women Productions, LLC* and *All Things Birth*, she is nationally known for her experience in the practical application of the Life Course Perspective as it relates to reducing racial/ethnic disparities in infant mortality and improving women's health. Wrenn has consulted with communities around the country -- including Boston; parts of Wisconsin; Memphis; Alexandria, Virginia; and Harlem -- to help find solutions to this critical public health issue.

Following the keynote address on April 8, attendees met in a half-day April 9 action session, led by local panelists and roundtable leaders currently working to reduce infant mortality in Tarrant County.

Led by SPH Dean Richard S. Kurz, the 2010 North Texas Health Forum planning committee included Dr. Kathryn Cardarelli, SPH professor and director of the UNTHSC Center for Community Health; Sally Crocker, SPH communications manager; Kathleen Donaldson, CNM, MS, UNTHSC Obstetrics and Gynecology; Dr. Josephine Fowler, JPS Health Network; Barbara Greer, Cook Children's Medical Center and the Tarrant County Infant Mortality Network; Julie Griffin, UNTHSC Institutional Advancement; Jennifer Hill-Green, Catholic Charities Diocese of Fort Worth; Marcy Paul, YWCA Fort Worth and Tarrant County and The Fort Worth Commission for Women; Amy Raines, City of Fort Worth Women's Health Initiative; Jerry Roberson, Tarrant County Infant Mortality Network; Ann Salyer-Caldwell, Tarrant County Public Health; and Joy M. Thomas, Fort Worth Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Alumni Chapter.

To view slides of speaker presentations, please click on the following links:

Reducing Infant Mortality in Tarrant County: Understanding the Life Course Approach to Reducing Infant Mortality – *presented by Audra D. Robertson, MD, MPH, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School*

Infant Mortality Can Be Reduced: Implementing the Life Course Approach Using a Public Health Social Movement – *presented by Tamara Wrenn, MA, CCE, CIMT, Senior Consultant, Practice Matters, a Subsidiary of Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership, Inc.*

The Life Course Approach: Why it is Relevant to Tarrant County- *presented by Katie Cardarelli, PhD, Director, Center for Community Health, UNT Health Science Center*

Please click [here](#) to read more about the results of the Health Forum's April 9 roundtable sessions

Please click [here](#) for the attendee evaluation results from the 2010 North Texas Health Forum