Purdue initiative aims to educate blacks about heart health
Peer educators will try to reach 25,000 to 30,000 people a year in Marion, Lake counties

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It's hard to take high cholesterol seriously if you don't know what cholesterol is.

A new Purdue initiative, conducted with the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, aims to teach blacks the basics of heart health, such as what cholesterol can do.

Heart Health Indiana, unveiled Wednesday, will place peer educators in churches, at Indiana Black Expo and other places where African-Americans come together.

Social media and websites may work when it comes to reaching white populations, but they do not seem as effective for minority populations, said Mohan J. Dutta, director of Purdue's Center on Poverty and Health Inequities, who is spearheading the grant.

"A one-size-fits-all strategy will not work," he said.

But it's critical to find strategies that work for all populations, particularly minorities. Heart disease and related ailments claim the lives of 233 per 100,000 black people, compared with 196.5 per 100,000 whites, Dutta said.

The two-year, $1.5 million federal grant will place six peer educators in Marion County and six in Lake County. The goal is for them to reach 25,000 to 30,000 people a year to teach them about preserving their health.

They will have materials that the community helped the project produce over the past two years. Brochures -- about renal artery stenosis, atrial fibrillation, cholesterol and coronary heart disease --
are written in "accessible and meaningful" language, Dutta said.

The majority of information about heart disease features nonminority faces, which does not draw in patients who are not white, said Carl Ellison, vice president and chief operating officer of the Indiana Minority Health Coalition.

"Much of health education is not developed by the community or with the community," he said. "This is an effort to try to customize the material."

The initiative will study about 10,000 of those reached to try to determine the materials' impact on people's health.

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