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NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Telligen Community Initiative funds colorectal screenings in Massac and Hardin counties

Colorectal cancer, the third most prevalent type of cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death in the United States, is not only curable but preventable if caught at an early stage. Unfortunately, despite the fact that a person's lifetime risk of developing CRC is one in 20, many men and women over the age of 50 simply refuse to take the screening that could quite easily save their lives.

Thanks to the Telligen Community Initiative (TCI) and the movement towards population health, these numbers could be drastically changed in the future and in Massac and Hardin counties, in particular. The TCI concept plan, derived from a foundational academic/public health partnership partially funded by the Illinois Nurses Foundation (INF), allows critical access hospitals such as Massac Memorial Hospital and Hardin County General Hospital, to partner with an area public health department – in this case, the Southern Seven Health Department – to create a dyad. This dyad then works together with a McKendree University MSN Population Health student to create a plan to address a specific health issue for the population it serves.

The Southern Seven Health Department serves Alexander, Hardin, Johnson, Massac, Pope, Pulaski, and Union counties. The goal of Southern Seven's Public Health Division is to protect and improve the health of the citizens of the seven southernmost counties in Illinois by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing, and responding to infectious diseases.

"The Center for Disease Control shows that the incidence rate for colorectal cancer in the United States is around 39 people for every 100,000. Both Massac and Hardin counties have an even higher incidence rate of colorectal cancer at 45 and 44 people, respectively, for every 100,000," said Rhonda Ray, Executive Director, Southern Seven Health Department. "When we heard of this opportunity, we jumped at the chance to be proactive and to ensure more people in our counties received the FIT (Fecal Immunochemical Test) colorectal screening. . . That goal is the basis for both of these important projects."

Securing grant funding through TCI, McKendree University partnered with the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network (ICAHN), Illinois public health departments serving rural populations, the Illinois Public Health Association (IPHA), the INF, and the Southern Illinois Public Health Consortium (SIPHC). Together, they hope to provide around 15 FIT kits each to Massac and Hardin county residents by September 30.

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Specifically, the Massac and Hardin County FIT programs involve a McKendree MSN student conducting research on CRC screening and incidence. This student will present the information at Massac County and Hardin County Medical Society meetings, along with information about FIT testing. The student will then make contact with any Massac or Hardin county physician that cannot attend this meeting. When these physicians have a patient who is unable or unwilling to obtain a colonoscopy, they will refer those patients to Southern Seven Health Department for FIT testing.

Upon completing the testing and finding the specimen is normal, the Health Department's Director of Nursing will send a letter explaining the finding directly to the patient. If the specimen is abnormal, the Director of Nursing (DON) will directly call the patient and their physician, as well as mail a letter, encouraging the patient to have a colonoscopy at either Massac Memorial or Hardin County General hospitals, depending on their geographic area. The student will work with the patient to ensure that a follow-up appointment is made, and that ultimately, a diagnosis determined and further treatment recommended. Calls and reminders will be made for up to four months to better ensure compliance.

"The health departments and the student will work with both Massac County and Hardin County physicians to educate them on the use of FIT and the referral process," said Rick Goins, CEO, Massac Memorial Hospital. "We will take the information and work with the health departments and the RN student to schedule and conduct colonoscopies for patients in a timely and efficient manner, even ahead of routine patients, since we already know they had an abnormal reading. This testing helps us help them faster."

The Massac County FIT and the Hardin County FIT programs are just two of five TCI projects currently underway in Illinois. The remaining three include Marshall Browning Hospital and the Perry County Health Department's "Building a Healthier Community: Tamaroa" program; and Southern Illinois Healthcare, St. Joseph Memorial Hospital, and the Jackson County Health Department's two programs respectively entitled, "Assisting Wound Care Patients with Diabetes to Better Manage Their Condition" and "Utilizing Collaborative Engagements to Support Vulnerable Rural Populations through Food Pantry Capacity-Building Interventions."

"There have been many moving pieces to ensure these population health projects happened for our rural and underserved populations. We needed to find all the right people to comprise our steering task force plus secure key partners in Illinois' public health departments and critical access hospitals. Then we needed all these people to come together and work towards completion of a common goal," said Dr. Janice Albers, DNP, RN, PHNA-BC, CLC, Project Chairman, McKendree University. "We now know this work is just the beginning...McKendree University will not only be offering 12 \$1,000 scholarships to population health students later this year (application deadline in December), we also plan to write another grant to renew and build on the foundational work from this year. Our focus remains to empower our students to make a difference in rural and underserved areas by learning through experience in conjunction with public health departments and critical access hospitals. By expanding on the current plan, we will be helping people achieve a better and healthier way of life."

This project was funded in part by the Telligen Community Initiative to initiate and support, through research and programs, innovative and farsighted health-related projects aimed at improving the health, social well-being, and educational attainment of society, where such needs are expressed.



TCI STEERING TASK FORCE COMMITTEE:

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