

## HEALTH

## Diabetes Remain High with Health Disparities

## Key is early diagnosis and management of disease

BY MINDY COOPER  
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

More than 241,000 Oregon residents are living with diabetes, and the numbers are on the rise.

Although the chronic disease affects people from all walks of life, the risk of diabetes are higher for Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and—especially African Americans.

In an effort to eliminate the disparities, Lifeworks NW and the Multnomah County Health Department developed ACHIEVE, a community planning process to address root causes of inequities in chronic diseases.

Rachael Banks, program supervisor at Multnomah County's Community Wellness and Prevention department, said the program was created in 2009 to help people make healthy choices.

"The goal was to get together a policy action team to look at the policies we have within our community, identify the gaps and then make a plan of action," said Banks. "When we came together three years ago, we asked what we wanted our legacy to be, and someone said, 'I don't want my grandchild to have diabetes.'"

Although the program is a nationwide effort, Banks explained Multnomah County was one of just two communities that focused on a specific population to address health disparities.

Diabetes, one of the leading causes of death and disability in the country, is defined as a group of diseases marked by high levels of blood glucose resulting from defects in insulin production, insulin action, or both.

Insulin, a hormone produced by the pancreas, helps the body absorb excess sugar from the bloodstream, but in a person with diabetes, blood sugar levels are not adequately controlled by insulin.

Although there is a common misconception that diabetes mostly develops from eating too much sugar, experts say our bodies are predisposed with genetic factors—especially in type II diabetes, which affects 90 percent of those with the disease.

Although the chronic condition can cause

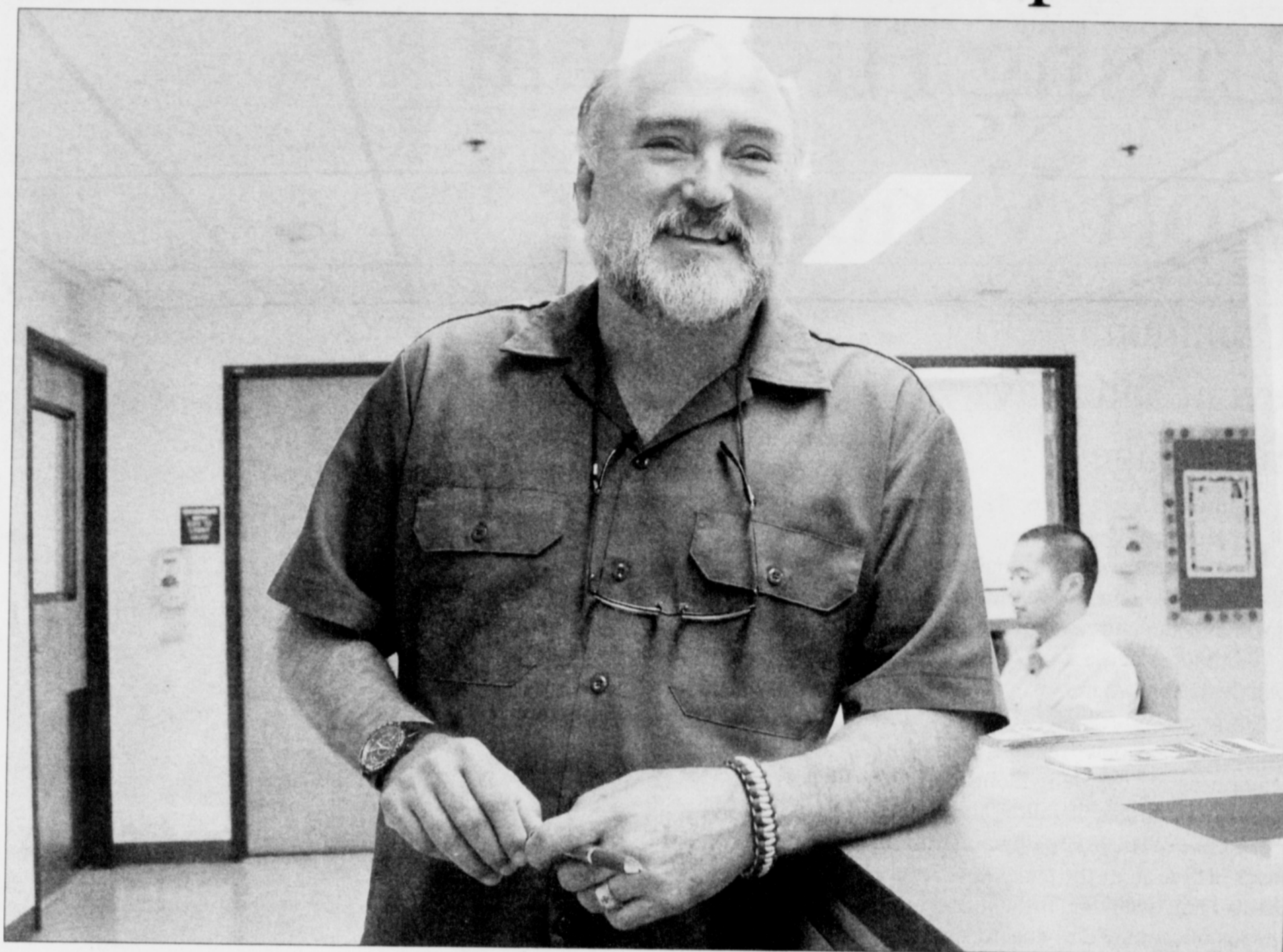


PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Michael Crocker, clinical nurse supervisor for Multnomah County's Northeast Health Center on Martin Luther King Boulevard, speaks out about the high-sugar content in certain foods products, helping patients manage diabetes and other health conditions.

serious complications in an individual's health and quality of life, people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk if diagnosed early and managed in a proper way.

According to Bruce Gutelius, the deputy state epidemiologist for the Health Authority, because diabetes is a long-term chronic disease, for which there is not necessarily a cure, management over a life span is necessary.

"The environment is a huge contributor to people developing and managing diabetes," he said. "We also know people developing and managing diabetes may not have what they need to have access to healthy food and physical activity in their surrounding area," he said.

Environmental disparities, Dukes said, is one of the reasons the department chose to focus specifically on African American populations. "We can and we should focus on strategies that work for the whole popula-

tion, and focus on those who have the highest risk and burden," he said.

Poverty, discrimination, oppression, and a lack of political power are some of the most common root factors in health inequities. The social environment can dictate the level of medical services received and the behavior of individuals.

According to Bev Bromfield, a regional program manager for the American Diabetes Association, healthcare costs can also range two to three times higher for people with diabetes than those without because of the high management costs of the disease.

"Typically, they are on one or two medications or more," said Bromfield.

Another issue is the marketing and availability of unhealthy foods in Portland's low-income neighborhoods.

ACHIEVE works to create policies and environments where people have better access to healthy foods, along with regular physical activities.

Several programs have also made it their goal to delay and manage an individual's health conditions as a means to prevent complications and improve quality of life.

A Living Well with Chronic Conditions program, for example, is a six week workshop series, where anyone with a chronic condition can meet once a week, including those suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure and/or arthritis.

Although there are participant costs for the program, some local organizations work with individuals who can't afford to pay.

Banks said ACHIEVE runs health clinics to increase care and focus on management.

"Ultimately, we want to stop people from getting diabetes in the first place. Often times it is a preventable condition," she said. "But one of the things the program wants to focus on is prevention."

Although the level of diabetes is on the rise, Banks said, "I have high hopes for the future."

## HEALTH WATCH

**Heart Talk Support Group** -- Meets on the second Monday of each month; from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, call 503-251-6260.

**Families with Mental Illness** -- A free, 12-week course for people whose family members live with mental illness is offered at

Emanuel Hospital, Mt. Hood Medical Center and Providence Medical Center. The course has been described as "life-changing" by former participants. Registration is required by calling 503-203-3326.

**Cholesterol Profiles** -- Get the resources to help you keep an eye on your cholesterol and

other indicators of heart health. Educational material provided. For more information, call 503-261-6611.

**Bereavement Support Groups** -- Free, safe confidential group meetings for those who have experienced the death of a loved one offered on various nights and locations. For information and registration, call 503-215-4622.

**Maternity Water Workout** -- Helping new

mothers regain muscle tone, strength, and flexibility, all in the support and freedom of the water. Call 503-256-4000 for more information.

**Senior Aerobics** -- A low-impact workout geared specifically toward seniors. Call 503-449-0783 for current schedule.

**Osteoporosis Screening** -- An ultrasound bone density screening with personalized education; fee \$30. To schedule an appointment, call 503-261-6611.