

# Community Grant Assists Physicians and Residents

By Judi Engle

Thanks to an impressive new community collaboration, some 85,000 Montgomery County residents without health insurance should soon have greater access to health and human services while providers of those services gain access to the advanced technology needed to better coordinate their efforts to serve that population.

The county joins approximately fifty communities nationwide awarded a federal grant to develop a comprehensive, community-wide plan to improve access to health care services. Montgomery County received \$936,000 through the Community Access Program initiative of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The proposal is the brainchild of the *HealthLink Miami Valley Network*, a community collaboration formed about 18 months ago. The group has representation from 17 area organizations and has been convening under the leadership of Richard Schuster, M.D., M.M.M., Boonshoft Chair and director of the

Division of Health Systems Management. The grant is administered through the Center for Healthy Communities.

Katherine Cauley, Ph.D., director of the Center for Healthy Communities and associate professor of community health and of psychology, and Rudolph Arnold, M.D., director of the Miami Valley Health Improvement Council, serve as co-directors. “The project,” says Cauley, “allows Montgomery County to take significant steps toward the goal of 100 percent access, 0 percent disparities and other national health objectives set in Healthy People 2010.”

This ambitious effort will link two information technology systems—the nationally recognized Greater Dayton Area Health Information Network (GDAHIN) and AgencyLink, a management information system supported by the Montgomery County Human Services Levy. Sponsored by the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association, GDAHIN helps hospitals and health care providers improve health care services and quality of care. The AgencyLink

system is being piloted as a national model in the Dayton community to assist human services providers in linking people to available resources. By integrating these two information systems, health and human services providers can reduce paperwork and better coordinate services.

At the same time, efforts will be made to reach out to the county’s large, almost invisible population of uninsured and underinsured residents to provide them with the information they need to make better use of the health and human services available to them. It is estimated that about one third of this population is eligible for Medicaid, Medicare or other public health services, but because of lack of information, these individuals are not accessing health care or human services. Many of them are among the “working poor” who do not receive health benefits from their employers because of the type or length of their employment. Without benefits that cover preventive, routine visits to a physician’s office, they often seek health care in hospital emergency rooms.

For example, if an elderly woman with diabetes arrives at

a local emergency room because of a dizzy spell, she will be treated and generally informed about her disease and the community services available to her. Her emergency room visit may be the only treatment she receives, even though she obviously needs support for a chronic condition. With the integration of GDAHIN and AgencyLink, she will be able to receive detailed information about follow up care and services and be linked to appropriate resources immediately while receiving emergency care.

Working with the Medicaid outreach efforts of the Montgomery County Department of Job and Family Services, specially trained outreach workers will assist in matching residents with health care providers. Individuals without health care or health care insurance will be identified, contacted, informed about existing resources and directed to needed health care services.

At the end of this planning year, the *HealthLink Miami Valley Network* hopes to implement a long-term plan to ensure that every Montgomery

County resident has access to health care services, strengthening the community's safety net and creating a healthier Dayton community.

**Note:** The *HealthLink Miami Valley Network* includes representatives from the following organizations: the Center for Healthy Communities; the Department of Pediatrics, the Department of Community Health and its Division of Health Systems Management at Wright State University School of Medicine; the Miami Valley Health Improvement Council; the Combined Health District of Montgomery County; the Greater Dayton Area Hospital Association; CareSource; Montgomery County Job and Family Services; the Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board; the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce; the Gem City Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Society; the Dayton Foundation; and the Health Ministries Association of Southwest Ohio.