

Talking control

13 complete Diabetes Empowerment Education Program

TOM EADER

ST. CROIX — A group of 13 individuals who graduated from a free diabetes program, "Diabetes Empowerment Education Program" on Wednesday in the AARP offices have been empowered to take control of their diabetes, the fourth leading cause of death in the territory in 2007.

"We know diabetes, although it is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States, is preventable," said Dr. Cora Christian, Virgin Islands Medical Institute medical director, indicating African-Americans are three to four times more likely to become afflicted with the disease than non-Hispanic Caucasians.

VIMI, the territory's quality improvement organization which facilitated the DEEP course, also facilitated the training of 22 community health workers to be trained and instruct the course. All of the instructors, consisting of health care professionals such as physicians, dietitians, nurses, pharmacists and nutritionists, volunteered their time and expertise. The DEEP course is open to anybody, but the primary goal is to target Medicare beneficiaries.

"The primary purpose of a person or Medicare recipient to take the Diabetes Empowerment Education Program is to self-manage their diabetes," said Monsita Diaz, VIMI accounting/program support coordinator who was the lead



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Individuals who graduated from the first class of the Diabetes Empowerment Education Program during a ceremony Tuesday in the AARP offices in Sunny Isle pose for a picture along with class instructors and volunteers.

Nelthropp said.

Nelthropp said the program doesn't change what a physician has ordered, but it enhances what a physician has ordered. She said the program also gave the participants support, considering they took the course with other individuals who have diabetes.

"What we're trying to get across to these people is that empowerment passes down from you to your sons, your daughters, your grandchildren," Nelthropp said. "Bring them to the next classes because they're the next generation that's going to be affected by it. We want this to stop. If we can't stop it, we can control it."

Elisa Dennis, one of the individuals who graduated from the DEEP course Tuesday, said the course taught her a lot about diabetes, including the fact that the disease can have an affect on organs within the body. She said she could ask the course instructors any question and they would take the time to answer her.

"I learned to control my diabetes," Dennis said. "I learned more about exercising without standing up or walking. I learned about my medication. I learned a whole lot."

The next free DEEP course begins Feb. 24. Individuals interested in signing up for the course can do so by calling VIMI at 712-2400. The individuals who sign up for DEEP course determine how frequent they meet and how long the course runs.

group, and I know that there are many out there that would benefit from it."

Rikki Nelthropp, one of the community health workers who instructed the DEEP course, said she thinks one of the main success stories that came out of the course is that because of the way the program is structured it empowered people with diabetes.

"What it has done is changed it from a passive acceptance of a disease to something that now they partner with their doctor and their families in, and it gave them that confidence to ask questions to get answers that were appropriate."

She said the instructors show the participants the body's organs and explain the organ's functions. She said the instructors also teach foot care, which helps in preventing amputations, as well as eye care. She said the participants also learn about nutrition.

Diaz said one of her goals is to make sure all the Medicare beneficiaries take care of themselves, considering the high rate of diabetes in the Virgin Islands. She said she also wants to target Hispanics.

"My goal right now is to target a Hispanic group," Diaz said. "We only had one Hispanic in the

community health worker for the course. "We gave them eight different modules. Each module runs from an hour to an hour and a half."

The DEEP program consists of eight modules. The modules include understanding your body; understanding diabetes and its risk factors; monitoring your body; physical activity; making meal/food labels; complication, identification and prevention; medications and medical care; and coping with diabetes — mobilizing family and friends.

Diaz said the DEEP course includes a lot of hands-on training.