SVS Foundation Projects Aim to Improve Community Health

An SVS dream of increasing awareness of and preventing vascular disease is taking root across the country.

Three projects, funded by the first SVS Foundation Community Awareness and Prevention Project Grants, will:

• Provide preventive care to those at risk for diabetic foot infections

• Educate high school students about vascular risk factors and disease so they, in turn, can educate family members

• Add vascular screening to a long-established health screening event in an area with one of the highest rates of diabetes in the country

The grants were awarded in June during the Vascular Annual Meeting. Three community-based vascular surgeons received up to $10,000 for an innovative, community-based initiative.

“It was tough to choose just three,” said former SVS Foundation Chair Dr. Ronald M. Fairman. “The three we ultimately accepted were very much aligned with our aim to promote disease prevention, reach out to the community and advance public awareness of vascular health.”

**V-Health Initiative**

Manish Mehta, MD, MPH, of Queensbury, N.Y., plans to empower high school students to diagnose and understand the impact of vascular risk factors and disease. This project is an outgrowth of a pilot program begun in 2016, designed to make high school students aware of how risk factors early in life impact their vascular health decades later.

The now day-long program includes 14 high schools, numerous regional hospitals, medical practices, insurance companies and nonprofit organizations and a volunteer group of more than 150 physicians, allied professionals, teachers and patients.

Early results show promise. Nearly 400 students participated in hypertension screenings, measuring their parents’ blood pressures daily for a week; 14 percent had a pre-existing hypertension diagnosis and an additional 65 percent of parents previously undiagnosed were found to have HTN.

Dr. Mehta also wants to help increase awareness of the expertise of vascular surgeons. Vascular surgeons need to
“take charge, innovate, differentiate our specialty and re-define our brand,” he said. Other specialists focus on what they do and how they do it; Dr. Mehta believes the focus should instead be on “WHY we do what we do.”

**Diabetic Foot Education**

Marcus Semel, MD, MPH, and Edward Marcaccio, MD, both of South Shore Hospital and Brigham and Women’s Hospital near Boston, hope to reduce emergency room visits and hospitalizations for diabetic foot infections, in part by providing comprehensive diabetic preventive care for those at risk for such infections.

Dr. Semel’s program will capitalize on the interconnected nature of the health system, which includes the hospital plus a home-health visiting nurse service, a wound-healing center and a primary care practice.

With electronic records flagged, diabetic patients discharged from the hospital will receive visiting nurse services, including a comprehensive diabetic evaluation as well as education. Patients will have a foot examination, an in-home ankle-brachial index screening, hemoglobin testing and referrals where appropriate. Such referrals can include shoes, education, counseling on quitting smoking and further evaluations.

Data collected after six months of intervention will analyze emergency room visits and hospitalizations for diabetic foot infection.

**Vascular Health Screening**

Elizabeth L. Detschelt, MD, will expand a long-established Wellness Check held across the Excela Health service area in Pennsylvania by adding a Vascular Health Awareness and Screening event. She is director of vascular surgery for the service area in several counties in Pennsylvania. Screenings will include blood pressure, an abdominal aortic ultrasound, carotid duplex screening, an ankle-brachial index measurement and a foot check. Two board-certified vascular surgeons will read and review all tests and offer real-time recommendations. Dietitians, diabetes educators and wound specialists will be available to all attendees, not just those present for a vascular screening.

The need is great, said Dr. Detschelt. Portions of the areas have some of the highest population of diabetes in the country, Pennsylvania itself has one of the highest rates of smoking in the country and there is a general lack of awareness and understanding in the general medical community of vascular disease and the relationship to heart disease, diabetes, obesity and vascular health.

**Many Great Projects Submitted**

Sometimes it was small details that the committee selecting the recipients found intriguing, said Dr. Fairman of the difficulty in selecting the three. He cited the popularity of Dr. Mehta’s existing efforts to educate teens as well as the project’s simplicity and powerful impact; the high diabetes rate in Dr. Detschelt’s area; and the intriguing concept of preventing diabetic foot infections by identifying patients discharged for another reason.

The projects are the first in the Foundation’s efforts to broaden its outreach to all SVS members, from academics and researchers who receive many of the Foundation’s grants to those in community practice, which comprise a majority of SVS members.

“The Foundation’s work is relevant to every one of our members, in all practice types,” said Dr. Fairman. “This new project expands our reach, adds visibility to our work and, as is the case with everything we do, hopefully will improve patient care.”

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