Editorial, 2

Special Report

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?



KATE LONG | Sunday Gazette-Mail photos

At least a third of Boone County adults are at risk of diabetes, but public health nurse Liz Lawson's monthly support group is the only open-to-the-public, ongoing diabetes education service in the county. "We're trying to organize a county diabetes project," said Lawson, pictured here in Danville. The state does not track and list services statewide.

State doesn't keep track of diabetes classes, services

Newspaper pulls together list



THE SHAPE WE'RE IN

Want to read other 'Shape We're In' stories?

Find them all at wvgazette.com/theshapewerein

By Kate Long Staff writer

"I read that story in the paper and was hoping you could help me," Carolyn said. "I don't know where else to turn."

Carolyn (not her real name) lives in Madison. "I just got diagnosed diabetic, and I want to get a grip on it," she said. "I need help, but don't know where to look. I thought maybe you could tell me where I can find one of those counselors."

She had read about a Mingo County man who brought his out-of-control blood sugar down to normal by working for months with a diabetes coach. "I need a counselor like that," she said.

So do tens of thousands of other West Virginians. After every newspaper story about diabetes, people call.

Another Boone County woman, Judy Handley of Danville, called a few days earlier. "I don't have diabetes, but sugar's all over my family," she said. "I want to take one of those classes that teach you how to



The state's diabetes program funds Marshall University to generate self-management classes in churches, fire halls and other places where people gather. Here, Dee Wilder (center) of the Bureau of Senior Services and Wendy Lewis (right) of the Partnership of African-American Churches lead a six-week class at St. Albans' Hansford Senior Center. The classes work well, said Sally Hurst, project coordinator, "but we need many more to make a difference."

keep from getting it."
About 125,000 diabetics live in

About 125,000 diabetics live in West Virginia, according to Gallup Healthways. Another estimated 125,000 are near-diabetic, but can still head it off.

Less than half have ever talked with anyone who could show them how to prevent or control "sugar" through physical activity, what they eat, and medication management, according to a federal Centers for Disease Control survey.

If this were Kentucky, the two Boone County women could go to the Kentucky Diabetes Resource Directory on the Internet and find a county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes, doctors and distributed in the county-by-county list of classes.

tors, and dieticians.

They can't do that in West Virginia. Nobody in West Virginia

— including the West Virginia

Diabetes Prevention and Control Program — has a list of services, much less a county-by-county list

With no list, nobody in West Virginia really knows what diabetic services are available or where they are. That makes it hard for anyone to accurately target areas of greatest need.

About seven years ago, there was such a map on the West Virginia Diabetes Prevention and Control program website. People could click on any county and find services available in that county, if any.

The state took it down. "It took too much staff time to keep it updated," program manager Gina Wood said in May.

West Virginia's program has only three staff people and a budget of about \$1 million in "Most of all, it creates a problem for people who need help. A lot of state diabetics are pretty much on their own when they try to learn how to control their diabetes."

PAT WHITE West Virginia Health Right

state and federal money. "We struggle to find out what's going on," Wood said. "We just don't have the troops to do what needs to be done."

West Virginians pay more than a billion dollars for diabetes care annually. Diabetes leads to heart and kidney disease and many other serious problems. It's in every taxpayer's interest to prevent more diabetes, said health economist Ken Thorpe.

To slow the rise of health-care costs, Thorpe said, West Virginia should set up a network of programs that help people prevent and control diabetes, he said. A first step: a list of existing services.

'That's how uncoordinated we are'

A list can be an important thing. In some states, the American Diabetes Association keeps a list. But the ADA closed its West Virginia office three years ago. They say they're coming back in 2013, but they're not here now.

It's hard for doctors to refer patients for self-management training when there's no list, said state Sen. Evan Jenkins, D-Cabell, director of the West Virginia State Medical Association. "A good education program takes weeks," he said. "It

SEE **AGENCIES, 4C**

LOOKING FOR DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT SERVICES IN W.VA.?

Trying to find diabetes education services in West Virginia "is like trying to find pieces of a jigsaw puzzle," said Shannon Meade, director of Logan County's Family Resource Network. They're scattered around, and "you need them all to see the whole picture."

The state offers no statewide list of diabetes education services, though West Virginia leads the nation in diabetes. The Gazette-Mail pulled together this list with help from various organizations. Feel free to send complete additions or corrections to gazette@wvgazette.com with "Diabetes list" in the subject line.

Hospitals

Most West Virginia hospitals offer one-on-one diabetes education to their patients. The following also offer self-management classes and/or support groups to the public. Some are free, and some are expensive. Only three offer classes for children or teens. Most offer classes a few times a year. Most services require a doctor's referral and are covered by insurance. As of June 15, all listed hospitals have one-on-one diabetes consults:

Braxton Memorial Hospital, Sutton. 304-364-1126. Counseling sessions with a dietitian who visits once a month.

* Broaddus Hospital, Philippi. 304-637-3139. Classes through Davis Memorial Hospital in Elkins.

** Cabell Huntington
Hospital/University
Physicians, Huntington. 304-691-1662.
Self-management classes
through Marshall University. Free
monthly diabetes support group.
Referral to free cooking classes.
Visit http://musom.marshall.edu/diabetes/index.asp.

Camden Clark Hospital, Parkersburg. 304-424-2400. Self-management classes, support groups at Diabetic Wellness Center, consults with dietitian and certified diabetes educator. Visit http://ccmh.org/ChoosingUs/DiabetesWellnessCenter.aspx.

* Charleston Area Medical Center, Charleston. 304-388-5555. 10-hour (3 days) American Diabetes Association-recognized diabetes self-management training (can be billed to insurance or \$740 cost), one-on-one or group, billable to insurance. Certified diabetes educator and dietitian. No support groups. Visit http://www.camc.org/body.cfm?id=730

City Hospital, Martinsburg. 304-596-6839. Children's support group, teen group, adult group, led by certified diabetes educator. Four-week Lifeskills diabetic education classes.

Davis Memorial Hospital, Elkins. 304-637-3139 or 304-642-0618. Certified diabetes educator, 12-hour free "Help Yourself" self-

management program, four-session
"Lifeskills" medical self-management classes
with physician referral (with scholarship if
needed), monthly support group,
public information presenta-

Fairmont General Hospital, Fairmont. 304-367-7543. Free "Sweet Talk" diabetes education programs, currently unavailable while hospital hires a diabetes educator.

** Grant Memorial Hospital,
Petersburg. 304-257-1044
ext. 3. Referral to self-management group classes and consultations at American Diabetes Association-recognized program at Judy's Drug Store.

★ Greenbrier Valley Medical Center, Lewisburg. 304-647-6079. Monthly support group.

** Hampshire Memorial Hospital, Romney. 304-822-4561. Consults with dietitian, with doctor's referral. Classes offered at affiliated hospital, Winchester Medical Center in Winchester, Va.

★ Jackson General Hospital, Ripley. 304-373-1475. Classes taught by registered dietitian at least quarterly.

✗ Jefferson Memorial Hospital, Ranson. 304-728-1693. Fourweek, free self-management class, open to the community.

Logan Regional Medical Center, Logan. 304-831-1101 ext. 1637. Program in development. No self-management classes or support groups yet. One-time seminars, registered dietitian, occasional healthy shopping tours.

Minnie Hamilton Health Center, Grantsville. 304-354-9244 ext. 2002. Free diabetes support group meetings.

Monongalia General Hospital, Morgantown. 304-598-0763. Diabetes education classes, monthly diabetes support group at Diabetes Learning Center, certified diabetes educator, dietitian.

Montgomery General Hospital, Montgomery. 304-442-1243. Lunch seminars.

* Ohio Valley Medical Center, Wheeling. 304-234-8755. Certified diabetes educator, consults with dietitian, diabetes self-management classes

* Plateau Medical Center, Oak Hill. 304-469-8600. Consults with digitizan, with referral

with dietitian, with referral.

* Pleasant Valley Hospital, Point Pleasant. 304-675-4340 ext.

1323. Counseling with diabetes nurse, group classes in planning

Pocahontas Memorial Hospital, Buckeye. 304-799-7400 ext.

1032. American Diabetes Association-recognized classes, free monthly support group.
Potomac Valley Hospital, Keyser. 304-597-3500. Occasional

Potomac Valley Hospital, Keyser. 304-597-3500. Occasional group classes and regular support group.
 Princeton Community Hospital, Princeton. 304-487-7242.

Free diabetes meal planning class every other Thursday. Four times a year, free four-day intensive diabetes self-management classes, with follow-up by certified diabetes educator. Monthly diabetic support group.

Reynolds Memorial Hospital, Glen Dale. 304-845-3211. Self-management classes.
 Roane General Hospital, Spencer. 304-927-6846. American

SEE **LIST, 4C**

I Please include complete name

FROM PAGE 1C

Association of Diabetes Educators-accredited self-management classes. May create support group in the fall.

- * Sistersville General Hospital, Sistersville. 304-652-2611. Looking for a diabetic educator to offer program.
- Saint Francis Hospital, Charleston. See Thomas Health Systems.
- Summersville Regional Medical Center, Summersville. 304-872-8402. Occasional cooking classes.
- Summers County Appalachian Regional Hospital, Hinton. 304-466-2918. Monthly two-hour group diabetes education class. Call for time and information.
- Thomas Health System (Thomas Memorial and Saint Francis hospitals), Charleston and South Charleston. 304-766-3431. Four-week American Diabetes Association-recognized self-management classes in morning, afternoon and evening. Costs about \$900, can be billed

w United Hospital Center, Clarksburg, serving Harrison and Marion counties, 681-342-1860. Support groups and one-on-ones for adults and children, American Diabetes Association-approved self-management classes and chronic disease self-management classes, gestational diabetes counseling, multiple-dose insulin training, dietitian

War Memorial Hospital, Berkeley Springs. 304-258-6577. Diabetes support group, once a

counseling.

Free clinics

All the state's 11 free clinics offer

diabetes services, some more ex-

tensively than others. Health Right

clinics provide free services to peo-

ple who earn too much to qualify

for Medicaid, but not enough to

buy health insurance. To locate a

free clinic, visit www.wvafc.org.

West Virginia Health Right,

Charleston, 304-414-5930. Dia-

betes self-management training,

Weight Watchers, cooking class-

Ebenezer Medical Outreach,

Huntington. 304-529-0753. Dia-

classes. No one-on-one consults.

3700. Diabetic dental counseling only.

classes at Princeton Community Hospital.

betic cooking class. Occasional self-management

Health Access Inc., Clarksburg. 304-622-

2708. United Hospital Center gives Health Right

patients diabetes self-management classes free of

Susan Dew Memorial Clinic, Milford. 304-745-

Eastern Panhandle Free Clinic, Ranson. 304-724-

6091. One-on-one counseling, help with transportation to

Mercer Charitable Clinic, Bluefield, 304-323-2431.

One-on-one self-management training, referral to free

Milan Puskar Clinic, Morgantown. 304-292-8234.

es, diabetic testing supplies.

charge with referral.

West Virginia University Hospitals, Morgantown. 304-598 4391 ext. 1. At Ruby Memorial Hospital: Group classes for patients and their

supporters; once-a-month support group; gestational diabetes services. Visit http://wvuhealthcare.com/wvuh/Healthcare-Services/Diabetes/Diabetes-Education-Center.

- West Virginia University Hospitals East, Martinsburg and Ranson: One-on-one consults, American Diabetes Association-recognized classes and three free support groups: children, teens, adults, once a month. * Wetzel County Hospital, New Martinsville. 304-455-
- 8000. Certified diabetes educator offers classes once a month. Diabetes self-help class once a month, monthly support group. Wheeling Hospital, Wheeling. 304-242-9355. Howard Long Wellness Center offers "Keys to Control"
- self-management classes, morning, afternoon and early evening. Adults only, but classes for diagnosed children in the planning. Exercise physiologist, certified diabetes educator, registered dietitian.
- Williamson Memorial Hospital, Williamson. 304-235-2930. Two-session classes with certified diabetes educator.

More resources

■ Certified diabetes educators. Many work at hospitals, health centers and pharmacies. Some take private clients. The American Association of Diabetes Educators lists 51 in West Virginia. A partial list is at http://www.diabeteseducator.org/DiabetesEducation/Find.html

■ Endocrinologists (diabetes specialists). West Virginia's 48 endocrinologists are concentrated in more urban areas. Forty-one counties have none. The West Virginia Board of Medicine lists them at http://www.wvbom.wv.gov.

■ Face to Face. Diabetics covered by the Public Employees Insurance Agency can get ongoing counseling through a participating Face to Face pharmacist in 51 counties, https://www.peiaf2f.com.

■ Dining with Diabetes. Many WVU Extension agents offer cooking classes and nutrition education, http://www.ext.wvu.edu/county offices.

Chronic Disease Self-Management classes. Volunteers trained by Marshall University staff lead classes at churches, health clinics, fire departments, hospitals and other community sites. Classes for people with all chronic illnesses, including diabetes. For schedules and video: http://www.selfmanagementonline.org.

Wheeling Health Right, Wheeling. 304-233-9323 ext. 8. Certified diabetes educator offers group classes on nutrition and cooking, medication management, physical activities, weight loss clinic.

Classes once a week. Beckley Health Right, Beckley. 304-253-3577. One-on-one counseling and group classes, Weight Watchers, diabetes cooking classes, can get testing supplies. Hinton

Health Right, Hinton. 304-466-9222. One-on-one diabetic counseling, referrals to fitness center,

Weight Watchers. Diabetic counseling available free at Appalachian Regional Hospital, Hinton.

Good Samaritan Clinic, Parkersburg. 304-834-3986. One-on-one diabetes self-management training. Good Samaritan patients can get free or reduced-cost classes. with referral, at the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department and Camden Clark Hospital.

Pharmacies

Four West Virginia drug stores are certified through the American Association of Diabetes Educators to provide diabetes education to the general public, reimburseable by Medicare and some private insurance:

Parkersburg, Rite-Aid, Dudley Street, 304-422-4657. Certified diabetes educator, individual education and counseling. Diabetes support group.

* Beckley, Colony Drug, Robert C. Byrd Drive, 304-252-5305 ext. 16. Certified diabetes educator, individual counseling, meter and monitor training, has applied for certification for group classes. Email Avaughn@suddenlinkmail.com.

🔆 Grafton, Rite-Aid, North Pike Street, 304-265-0758. Four diabetes specialists, one-on-one education and counseling, monthly to weekly visits, depending on need.

Summersville, Nicholas Pharmacy, 304-872-2777. Diabetic counseling, medication management and lifestyle adjustment counseling. Set goals, then meet periodically. Certified diabetes educator-in-training. Face to Face and general public.

Two more state Rite-Aids have applied for certification: on Mac-Corkle Avenue Southeast in Char-

leston (Kanawha City) and on Fairmont Road in Westover.

Community health centers

All 28 federally funded community health centers offer one-on-one diabetes consults, and some also offer diabetes classes and/or support groups. Fees are based on income. To find a center, visit wvpca.org.

* Barbour: Belington Medical Clinic, Belington, 304-823-2800. Classes.

Berkeley: Shenandoah Community Health, Martinsburg. 304-263-4999, ext. 1024, or vrockwell@svms.net. Certified diabetes educator. Classes.

Boone/Raleigh: Hygeia Facilities, Whitesville. 304-854-1321.

Cabell: Valley Health Systems, Huntington. 304-525-3334 ext. 1

Calhoun/Gilmer: Minnie Hamilton Health Center. Grantsville and Glenville. 304-354-9244. Certified diabetes educator. Classes, community gym.

Clay: Primary Care Systems, Clay. 304-587-7301. Group diabetic medical visits. Classes.

Fayette/Raleigh: New River Health Association, Scarbro and Beckley. 304-465-2032 or 304-465-2292. Group

medical visits, classes. Grant: E.A. Hawse Health Center, Baker and Petersburg. 304-897-5915. Classes. Patients only.

Greenbrier: Northern Greenbrier Health Clinic, Williamsburg. 304-645-7872 ext. 17. Classes. Patients only.

* Greenbrier: Rainelle Medical Center, Rainelle. 304-438-6188. Patients only. Classes.

Hancock/Brooke: Change Inc., Weirton. 304-797-

* Kanawha: Cabin Creek Health Center, Dawes and Clendenin. 304-595-5006 ext. 163. Classes. Patients only.

Kanawha/Putnam: FamilyCare Health Cen-

ter, Teays Valley 304-757-6669, Charleston 304-720-4466. Classes. * Lincoln: Lincoln Pri-

mary Care Center, Hamlin. 304-824-5806. Classes and community gym. Marion: Monongahela Valley Association of

Health Centers, Fairmont. 304-367-8727. Classes. Certified diabetes educator. McDowell: Tug River Med-

ical Center, Gary 304-448-2101. Fitness center, retinopathy. Mercer: Bluestone Health Center, Prince-

ton. 304-431-5499. Classes. Monongalia: Clay-Battelle Health Services Association, Blacksville. 304-432-8211.

Monroe: Monroe Health Center, Union and Peterstown.

304-772-3064. Certified diabetes educators. Classes.

Pendleton: Pendleton Community Care, Franklin. 304-358-2355.

* Preston/Taylor: Community Health Center, Grafton. 304-265-0312.

Ritchie/Pleasants: Ritchie Primary Care Association, Harrisville. 304-643-4005. Classes.

Roane: Roane County Family Health Care, Spencer. 304-927-8140. Classes.

W Upshur: Tri-County Health Clinic, Rock Cave 304-924-6262. * Webster: Camden on Gauley Medical Center. 304-

226-5725. * Wetzel: Community Health Center of Northwestern

Wetzel County, Burton. 304-775-4671.

Wirt: Wirt County Health Services Association, Elizabeth. 304-273-1033. Classes at senior centers.

Health departments

Only four county health departments offer diabetic services beyond finger sticks and basic information. State law does not require — or pay — health departments to offer more complete services. Here are the ones that do:

Mid-Ohio Valley. This six-county department offers full-scale classes and individual counseling at health department offices, local businesses, schools, churches and other sites. Includes Wood, Pleasants, Roane, Wirt, Calhoun and Ritchie counties, 304-485-7374.

* Lincoln. Individual counseling at the Hamlin office and a parish nurse program in numerous county church-

es, 304-824-3330. 💸 Randolph. Individual group counseling in partnership with Davis Memorial Hospital, 304-636-0396.

Boone. A monthly diabetes support group meets in Danville, 304-369-7967.

Diabetes support groups

In support groups, diabetics trade information, advice and encouragement. Medical professionals may attend, but the sessions are not detailed education classes. Below are contacts and meeting times as available for support groups around the state:

Boone: Boone County Health Department, 304-369-7967, liz.g.lawson@wv.gov.

* Cabell: Huntington, Marshall University 304-691-1662. Second Monday of the month, 6 p.m. nasha@marshall.edu.

Calhoun: Minnie Hamilton Health Center, 304-354-9244, Second Monday, 5 p.m. bmckown@mhcc.com.

Gilmer: Minnie Hamilton Health Center. 304-462-7322. Fourth Monday, 5 p.m. sharper@mhhcc.com.

Greenbrier: Greenbrier Valley Medical Center. 304-793-3545. Third Tuesday, 5 p.m. Emilee.pac@gvmc.com.

> Harrison/Marion: United Hospital Center. 681-342-1000. Adults and children. Call for time. Jefferson: War Memorial Hospi-

tal. 304-258-6577. First Thursday, 6:30 p.m. pcooper@valleyhealthlink.com. No July or December meetings. Mercer: Princeton Commu-

nity Hospital. 304-487-7283. 304-487-7074. Third Thursday at 6:30 p.m. cpettey@pchonline.org

Mineral: Potomac Valley Hospital, **≈** 304-597-3500 ext. 3774. First Tuesday, 6 p.m.

Monongalia: Monongalia General Hospital, Diabetes Learning Center 304-598-0763. 3rd Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.. mccartya@monhealth-

syst.org Call to check time.

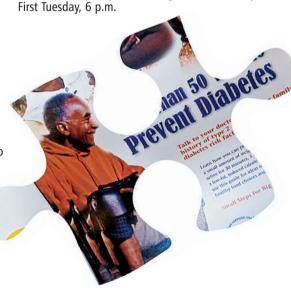
ჯ Monongalia: Ruby Memorial, 304-598-4391, ext. 1. Second Thursday, 6:30 p.m. Ky6c@wvuhealthcare.edu. Call or email for directions.

Pocahontas: Pocahontas Memorial Hospital, 304-799-7400 ext. 1032. Last Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. twagner@pmhwv.org.

Randolph: Davis Memorial Hospital, 304-457-4669. Second Tuesday, 6 p.m., mosesm@davishealthsystem.org.

* Wetzel: Wetzel County Hospital. 304-455-8000. Last Tuesday, 6 p.m. Wood: St. Johns United Church, Vienna, 304-422-

4657, sponsored by Parkersburg Rite Aid (Dudley Street). First Tuesday, 6 p.m.



AGENCIES

One-on-one counseling only.

FROM PAGE 1C

can't be provided in an office visit. A list makes it easy for doctors to refer." Lack of a list makes it hard

for hospitals too. "People come to our clinic from all over the state, but we have no listing to refer them to education programs in their area," said Dr. Bill Neal, pediatric cardiologist at West Virginia University Hospitals.

Krista Farley at the Kanawha-Charleston Health Department is working on a nine-county prevention program for a federal grant. "It would be incredibly useful for planners to be able to look and see what's already there," she said.

"Most of all, it creates a prob-

lem for people who need help," said Pat White, who directs West Virginia Health Right's diabetes program in Charleston. West Virginia leads the nation in diabetes, according to the Gallup Healthways poll, but "a lot of state diabetics are pretty much on their own when they try to learn how to control their diabetes," White said.

West Virginia program manager Wood said she did not realize Health Right — which serves 8,500 diabetics — operates a diabetes education program. "I didn't know the state had

a diabetes prevention program," White said. "So that's how uncoordinated we are.'

So how do West Virginians find help?

The Boone County Health Department offers a once-a-month diabetes support group, led by a

nurse. It is, by all accounts, the only publicly available education service in Boone County.

To get a self-management education class, Carolyn or Judy must drive to Charleston or Huntington. All Charleston hospitals offer multi-session classes, open to the public.

"I don't drive," Carolyn said. She can't get on the Internet. "I don't have a computer."

Community health centers Hygeia and FamilyCare do not offer diabetes education classes in Boone. FamilyCare's free classes are in Charleston or Teays Valley.

The Gazette-Mail decided to pull together a statewide list of services.

Agencies agreed to help. The West Virginia Hospital Association assembled a list of their members' education programs. The West Virginia Primary Care Association polled the state's 28 community health centers. The American Association of Diabetes Educators has a list of West Virginia members. The state Board of Medicine keeps a list of endocrinologists, diabetes specialists. Different sources helped with

diabetes support groups, free clinics and other lists. It took about two weeks for one person to compile this much. While the lists are incomplete, they are more compre-

hensive than anything else avail-A few things jump out: Most hospitals and com-

munity health centers offer at least one-on-one services, ranging from free to expensive, mostly for adults.

■ Very little is offered for atrisk children and teens, despite the fact that one in four fifthgraders is at risk of diabetes, according to WVU data.

Endocrinologists (diabetes specialists) and diabetes educators are concentrated in 11 of the more urban, wealthier counties.

■ Diabetes education group classes tend to be offered two to four times a year.

Only four health departments say they offer ongoing diabetes education: the Mid-Ohio Valley Health Department, based in Parkersburg, and health departments in Lincoln, Boone and Randolph counties. The state Bureau of Public Health sent the Gazette-Mail a list of 22 county health departments that told BPH they offer diabetes services, but 18 say they offer nothing beyond finger-sticks, pamphlets and oneshot conversations.

"We don't get paid to offer that, and we're stretched thin already," one public health nurse said. They all envy Kentucky. In Kentucky, the state pays every county health department to offer at least one diabetes selfmanagement class per year.

The Kentucky legislature supplied \$3.4 million for diabetes services last year (77 cents a year per Kentuckian), compared with West Virginia's \$108,000 (6 cents per West Virginian). "That makes a big difference in what a state program can do," Wood said. The lists that accompany

this article will stay on the Charleston Gazette website, wvgazette.com, www.livewellwv.com, managed by West Virginia University Extension Service. Anyone is free to use them. We hope some agency will adopt and update them.

Reach Kate Long at 304-348-1798 or katelong@wvgazette.com.

Reach Kate Long at 304-348-1798 or katelong@wvgazette.com. "The Shape We're In" was written with the help of the Dennis A. Hunt Fund for Health Journalism, administered by the California Endowment Health Journalism Fellowships at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

AMA supports adding obesity education to kids' curriculum

By Lindsey Tanner The Associated Press

CHICAGO — The American Medical Association on Wednesday put its weight behind requiring yearly instruction aimed at preventing obesity for public schoolchildren and teens.

The nation's largest physi- ed on the final day of the AMA's cians group agreed to support legislation that would require classes in causes, consequences and prevention of obesity for first through 12th graders. Doctors will be encouraged to volunteer their time to help with that under the new policy adopt-

annual policymaking meeting. Another new policy adopted Wednesday says the AMA sup-

ports the idea of using revenue from taxes on sugar-sweetened sodas as one way to help pay for obesity-fighting programs. But the group stopped short of fulSome doctors think soda tax-

ly endorsing such taxes.

es would disproportionately hurt the poor and disadvantaged. Others said taxes shouldn't be used to force people to make healthful decisions they should be making on their own.

Doctors at the meeting shared

en its focus on obesity prevention. "I can't tell you the number of 40-pound 1-year-olds I see

every day," Dr. Melissa Garretson, a Stephensville, Texas pediatrician, told the delegates before Wednesday's vote. She

sobering statistics and personal said requiring obesity educa-stories in urging the AMA to sharp-Obesity affects more than one-

third of U.S. adults and almost one in five children, or more than 12 million kids. Excess weight is strongly

linked with diabetes, heart disease and some cancers.