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NEWS

Future of Floyd County Health Department's prenatal program uncertain

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— Each year, the Floyd County Health Department's prenatal program sees around 300 women regularly — many of whom are uninsured or underinsured.

But those women may be turned away later this year unless the health department can find \$16,000 to continue the program past September.

On Tuesday night, Floyd County Health Officer Dr. Tom Harris asked the county council to consider giving the program the funds needed to make sure it continues through the end of the year.

He didn't get the answer he was looking for.

"I was a little shocked," he said. "I was hoping to get a little better response. I didn't think it was an unreasonable request."

The council didn't vote on Harris' request. Instead, he was told to look for funding elsewhere.

"You are just going to have to look for more grants. We just don't have the money," Council President Ted Heavrin told Harris.

Heavrin said the council wasn't planning to vote on a supplement. He said Harris was just there to talk about the program and the need for funds.

"Where are we going to get the money?" Heavrin asked. "We just don't have it."

Without two recent grants, the program would have already closed shop. Thanks to what Harris said were two "generous" gifts from the Horseshoe Foundation of Floyd County and the Floyd Memorial Hospital Foundation, the program will be able to survive through the summer.

"If we don't provide the services to these women, no one else will provide it," Harris said. "Floyd County is really getting off cheap. Not too many health departments have 16 [percent] to 17 percent of their funds come from the kindness of strangers."

Harris said it is "vital" important to a community to offer prenatal education and care for all women. He added that proper care reduces the mortality rate for at-risk pregnancies.

"This benefits the community," Harris said. "Hopefully, we can find some money somewhere."

Harris said the health department is already at "bare bones" when it comes to staffing. He said the department has 22 full- and part-time employees to cover all areas.

"They do a good job out there, but they are going to have to learn to fend for themselves," Heavrin said. "That is what we are telling the other office holders."

The health department will stop providing birth control, annual exams or STD checks as of Jan. 31 because of funding cuts. The clinic will continue to provide prenatal services and pregnancy testing. Planned Parenthood — 2708 Paoli Pike in New Albany — is now offering birth control services.

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Ted Heavrin, Floyd County Police Department