

Your Views

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To the editor, The sixth annual County Health Rankings were published by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and University of Wisconsin last week. I think we can learn a lot from Oswego County's rankings.

Before we review the data, allow me to briefly summarize the ranking system first. The ranking is composed of two major parts: Health Outcomes — how healthy a county is now — and Health Factors — how healthy a county will be in the future. Under each part there are two or more subcomponents. Health Outcomes are measured by the length and quality of life and Health Factors by health behaviors, clinical care, socioeconomic factors, and physical environment. Each subcomponent is supported by county level measures from a variety of national data sources.

Over the last six years, Oswego County has improved its Health Outcomes from the 46th among all 62 counties in the state to the 31st. The progression was a result of both improved length and quality of life for county residents.

Oswego's Health Factors ranked the 60th or the 61st for the most of these years. As for the four subcomponents of the Health Factors, health behaviors (the one measure we have the most individual control over) ranked the 62nd for five of the past six years. Clinical care showed a clear progression in this six-year period from the 61st in 2010 to the 31st in 2015. Socioeconomic factors remained in the middle 50's, while physical environment had the biggest variables, primarily due to changes in indicators used over the six-year period.

The county ranking data over these six years provides an ideal guideline as to how we should proceed. By concentrating healthcare efforts on people with certain chronic conditions, we have achieved health improvement in a short period of time; but if we want to profoundly improve our county health, we need to work with the whole population to change our health behaviors. In order to achieve long-term gains in our health as a county, we need to take a hard look at our individual health habits and commit to making changes that will lead to healthier, higher quality and longer lives.

Many grassroots efforts to change health behaviors in our community have already started. Catholic Charities implemented a comprehensive tobacco ban policy in their facilities more than a year ago. Four out of six existing, privately-owned pharmacies in Oswego County stopped selling tobacco before the national CVS chain took the action last October. SUNY Oswego became a tobacco-free campus early this year and Cayuga Community College's Fulton campus became tobacco-free on April 1. Oswego County OB/GYN P. C. is supporting more than 20 pregnant women in the Smoke Free for My Baby and Me cessation program. This year Riley Elementary School in the City of

Oswego and Minetto Elementary School piloted a program called Healthy Highway to promote nutrition literacy and increased physical activity among students. Northern Oswego County Health Services Inc. (NOCHIS) has been checking child obesity trends in part of the county. High school seniors in the New Vision's Health Track developed various projects to address obesity and smoking issues in the community in the past two cohorts of students.

On a broader scale, Legislature Chairman Kevin Gardner recently appointed a Community Health and Poverty Reduction Task Force to serve as a steering committee to guide a comprehensive study of programs and services available to help those in need in Oswego County. The county has hired CZB consulting group of Alexandria, Va., to lead a study of human services programs in Oswego County with the goal of improving the overall health and economic well-being of county residents.

Being ranked the 62nd for our health behaviors, among all 62 counties in the State, is not acceptable. Let's start to change the ranking but more importantly, our future by starting to change our health behaviors. To do so, we need everyone's involvement. The individuals, institutions, businesses, and organizations mentioned above exemplified how grassroots involvement can support change. They led the way, let's keep the momentum going. Together, we will build a community for ourselves and for future generations in which people live long, healthy and happy lives.

More details about health ranking are accessible at www.countyhealthrankings.org.

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