

# Meet Tuscola, Huron counties' shared dietitian

BY MARY DRIER  
Staff Writer

**THUMB AREA** – When Dietitian Lorraine Harrington is sitting at her computer in the Tuscola County Health Department, she can answer a Huron County resident's nutrition questions over the Internet.

There is a shortage of dietitians in the Thumb. "Using the 'Telehealth' system is a way to meet that need," said Ann Hepfer, nursing director, Tuscola County Health Department. "The Tuscola County Health Department is participating in the pilot Telehealth program with Huron County."

While Harrington is sitting in front of a monitor at the health department in Caro, she can access the state database and have the client on screen doing interactive education.

The program started in March. "There is a shortage of dietitians in the Thumb. This method is helping meet a need that could not be met otherwise and it seems to be working out," said Harrington who is a registered dietitian. "The program has a lot of potential."

The program has only been in place a few weeks. Harrington estimates she has assisted three Huron County residents while being at the Tuscola County Health Department and helping local residents as well.

"Huron County Health Department has been without a registered dietitian since last summer. These positions are often difficult to fill due to several factors. The position is often not full time, the pay can be lower than if they work in the private sector or for hospitals, rural areas seem to have difficulties in recruiting and training," Hepfer told *The Advertiser*. "She provides information on the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program to clients in Huron County."

"Tuscola County Health Department had a caseload of 1,508 in 2015 and Huron County caseload was 744."

In Tuscola County WIC contributes \$1,019,324 annually to the local economy, and about the same in Huron County.

"Tuscola County Health Department is open five days a week with outreach clinics offered in Vassar and two evening clinics a month are offered at the Health Department location," said Hepfer.

The Tuscola County Health Department and the Huron County Health Department have collaborated on other positions for several years. The health departments share the Health Officer Gretchen Tenbusch, Environmental Health Director Tip MacGuire, Billing Clerk Kris-Middaugh, and Jon Suber MIS Manager (Information Technology/computer), and now Registered

"The state WIC office worked with the health departments on this initiative and approved the policies and procedures for implementation," said Hepfer. "The departments are using a secure Polycom connection between the two health departments, and the Michigan WIC electronic records system."

WIC is a supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). It is a federally-funded program that helps low and moderate income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who have a nutrition-related health problem. WIC is a short-term intervention and education program. (See side bar)

Harrington is able to



deliver nutritional services to clients without ever having to leave the office.

"This is a very efficient approach to delivering the services and so far the clients have been happy with the level of services they are receiving."

Harrington is a graduate of Central Michigan University.

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(Submitted photo)

Using the "Telehealth Program," Dietitian Lorraine Harrington can sit at her computer in the Tuscola County Health Department and provide nutritional information to clients in Huron County about the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.

**The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program** is available at county health departments. It is a federally-funded program that helps low and moderate income pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women, infants, and children up to age five who have a nutrition-related health problem.

The purpose of the WIC program is to target low-income, and nutritionally at-risk populations:

- Pregnant women through pregnancy and up to six weeks after birth or after pregnancy ends.
- Breastfeeding women up to infant's

first birthday.

- Non-breastfeeding postpartum women (up to six months after the birth of an infant or after pregnancy ends).
- Children up to their fifth birthday.

The following benefits are provided to WIC participants:

- Supplemental nutritious foods: formula, breastfeeding supplies, baby cereals, food, milk, eggs, cheese, other dairy products, whole grain breads and fresh vegetables and fruits.
- Nutrition education and counseling breastfeeding support and one-on-one services, screening and referrals to other

health, welfare and social services.

WIC is not an entitlement program as congress does not set aside funds to allow every eligible individual to participate in the program. WIC is a Federal grant program for which Congress authorizes a specific amount of funds each year for the program. WIC is administered at the Federal level in 90 WIC state agencies through approximately 47,000 authorized retailers.

- WIC operates through 1,900 local agencies in 10,000 clinic sites, in 50 State health departments, 34 Indian Tribal Organizations, the District of

Columbia, and five territories (Northern Mariana, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands).

• To be eligible on the basis of income, applicants' gross income (i.e. before taxes are withheld) must fall at or below 185 percent of the U.S. Poverty Income Guidelines.

• Anyone on Medicaid who meets the other eligibility criteria for age automatically qualify

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

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