

Local Health Center To Provide Free Screenings For Diabetes

By **BARBARA THOMAS**
Courant Staff Writer

NEW BRITAIN — Thousands of people statewide have diabetes and don't know it. Many are not diagnosed until complications set in.

Health care professionals say that's why early detection is important, and why the Community Health Center of New Britain is offering free screenings today — Diabetes Alert Day nationwide. The screenings will be available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. outside the Adams supermarket on East Main Street.

Each participant will be asked to fill out a risk assessment questionnaire, and those found to be at high risk for diabetes will be given a finger-prick blood test. Results will be available immediately, and those with high blood sugar will be referred for medical attention.

"The point behind screening is that early detection and treatment relieves Type II [adult onset] diabetes and its complications," said Dr. Kevin Greene, an internist at the center. "Studies show that aggressive control of diabetes makes a difference."

Diabetes can affect the eyes, heart, kidneys and nerves. Diabetics run a much higher risk of heart disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease, which prohibits blood flow to hands and feet, and retinal disease, which can develop seven years before clinical signs of diabetes.

According to the state Department of Public Health, 114,500 people aged 18 and over were reported

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as having diabetes in 1996, Greene said, and an estimated 57,000 to 114,000 more probably had undiagnosed diabetes.

"I've seen the ugly side of diabetes," Greene said, telling the story of a man who went blind and had both legs amputated after ignoring early signs.

Risk factors for diabetes are:

- Family history (parent or sibling with the disease);
- Obesity;
- Race/ethnicity — African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders are at higher risk;
- Age — those 45 and older are more prone;
- High blood pressure;
- High cholesterol;
- A history of gestational diabetes or delivering a baby weighing more than nine pounds.

The major symptoms of diabetes are excessive thirst, frequent urina-

tion, unexplained weight loss and blurred vision.

This is the first time the center is going into the community to offer screenings. The aim is to raise awareness of a disease that affects the center's patient population, which is 65 percent Hispanic and 9 percent black.

Staff at the center, which is located at 1 Washington Square, plan to start a diabetes education program on May 1 that will teach patients how to monitor blood sugar, make dietary changes, use medications and reduce risk of complications.

Also, since asthma is prevalent in Hispanics and blacks — and generally in urban areas — the center offers an asthma education program. Of five community health centers in the state, New Britain's is the first to offer these educational programs.

The center has three internists, one of whom speaks Polish, two pediatricians and many Spanish-speaking staff members. For more information, call (860) 224-3642.