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## Helping with prenatal care

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Hiromi Bhandari, who moved to the United States from Japan 10 years ago, is six months pregnant with her first child.

When she found out last year that she was pregnant, she tried to apply for Medicaid and was denied. She was, however, given the phone number to Adopt-A-Mom, a nonprofit program sponsored by the Guilford County Coalition on Infant Mortality.

The program provides access to prenatal care, which usually averages about \$2,000, to women who can't afford health insurance but don't qualify for Medicaid.

The women in this gap had been showing up at emergency rooms to deliver their babies without any prenatal care, contributing greatly to the high rate of infant mortality in the area, said Charmaine Purdum, coordinator for the Guilford County Coalition on Infant Mortality.

Adopt-A-Mom was recently recognized as an example of excellence in community health improvement programming and is included in the <http://www.leadinghealthycommunities.com> online library of better practices case studies.

"Having reviewed hundreds of case studies, the Adopt-A-Mom Program was determined to be first in class," said Jon Comola, CEO of Wye River Group on Healthcare, the parent organization for LHC.

"It represents an example of excellence in community collaboration and health improvement and provides a blueprint for other communities to follow when launching their own health improvement efforts."

The process begins with a call to Claudia Matta, patient coordinator, to set up an initial appointment. At this appointment, the patient fills out paperwork and pays a \$100 intake fee.

"The doctor is very helpful, and I have a question I can ask Matta, and she can help me a lot," said Bhandari, 32. "Nothing has been hard."

Bhandari said that without Adopt-A-Mom, she and her husband would probably have needed help from her parents in Japan.

This \$100 fee is the patient's only payment for prenatal care. The Coalition on Infant Mortality covers the remaining \$300 through grants.

Delivery is not included in the \$400, but Purdum said most clients are eligible for emergency Medicaid assistance, which covers delivery.

The Coalition on Infant Mortality developed Adopt-A-Mom after the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported in 1988 that Guilford County's infant mortality rate was higher than the state's, which was the highest in the nation.

In 1991, the coordinators of Adopt-A-Mom went on a physician search, asking one practice after another if they would provide prenatal care at a reduced fee. They wanted all women in Guilford County to have access to the care they needed.

Five physicians agreed to perform for a flat fee of \$400.

In the beginning, the program served an average of 28 women a year. Now the average is 450 women, and the cost remains the same.

Patients have an average of 10 visits with the doctor, unless they have complications or other situations, such as twins. In that case, patients may see the doctor weekly, going to 17 or more appointments. This is all covered by the flat fee.

To qualify for the service, women must be residents of Guilford County, have a confirmed pregnancy, be ineligible for Medicaid, lack private health insurance or private funds for care and be 30 weeks pregnant or less.

Women more than 30 weeks pregnant are not turned away. They are given help finding another doctor they can see for a reduced fee, said Matta.

Beln Perez is six months pregnant and has been a patient with Adopt-A-Mom for four months.

"The best part is that all the time I can see the same doctor," she said, something she was unable to do when she had her first child.

Adopt-A-Mom patients are also referred to classes at the YWCA or the health department. The classes at the health department are in English and Spanish, a great help to many of the mothers who come through Adopt-A-Mom with language barriers, Matta said.

Adopt-A-Mom sometimes partners with the YWCA teen pregnancy program to refer teen mothers to doulas, who council them about their options for delivery and are present at the time of birth. The doulas visit the patient twice before delivery and twice after.

Bhandari said she is thankful for the care she has received.

"Adopt-A-Mom made it so easy," she said.

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