

Health promotions aims to educate students on sexual health

By AMBER GAUDET

“Sexual health” is a phrase that might still make some students uncomfortable if spoken above a whisper, but an initiative on campus is looking to change that.

Texas Woman’s University’s health promotions department, a branch of student health services, is aimed at providing a range of wellness services to students. Prominent amongst those offerings are sexual health services including screenings for sexually transmitted infections, barrier protection and educational resources. For college students – particularly young women – those services could end up meaning the difference between a curable infection and a debilitating illness with long-term consequences.

A study by the Centers for Disease Control found that young women between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for 45 percent of reported Chlamydia cases in 2015. The report also cited increased, long-lasting risks to young women who go undiagnosed including pelvic inflammatory disease, ectopic pregnancy and infertility.

Amy Allison, assistant director of TWU health promotions, said those potential complications from going untreated are a good reason to prioritize regular screens for STIs.

“When we provide sexual health education, we try to stress the importance of getting screened and tested to know your status, but also the importance of medical care for STIs,” Allison said. “It’s important to educate on ways to prevent STIs, but also educate on the importance of medical care to treat or manage STIs.”

Allison said that, at a minimum, students should get tested annually, but that she “encourage(s) every six months, or when ending a previous or starting a new sexual relationship.”

Students who have never been to a screening before can expect a similar process to a regular health appointment. For free HIV screenings, which health services offer periodically, the process differs only in that students will be screened by a health professional not employed by TWU.

“Students will be given a packet to fill out and then one of trained personnel from our partners with U-Prevent will escort the student back and go over the process and information and administer the test,” Allison said.

But, because STI testing is protected health information and screenings are done inside the health services center, Allison said that students should feel at ease.

Appointments typically last less than 30 minutes,

and students should get results before they leave the facility. Allison suggests students call health services to secure a specific time slot for free HIV screening, as appointments fill up quickly.

Aside from STI testing, Allison said that the health promotions department aims to support and educate students about sexual health in its many forms.

“Our goal is to connect students to relevant information to emphasize consent, healthy relationships, reduce risks and promote healthy choices,” Allison said.

Allison said that education is an important part of destigmatizing the conversation about STIs and encouraging those who are sexually active to get tested.

“I think by providing accurate information and reducing the negative stigma of getting tested and STIs,” Allison said. “I think the other thing to stress is that a positive STI test doesn’t mean ‘it’s the end.’ STIs, with proper treatment, some can be cured, and all can be managed.”

Students can request barrier protection products here and can access health resources about a variety of wellness topics at TWU Student Health 101. To make an appointment with student health services, call (940) 898-3887.