

Avera's 'Nurse Moonbeam' To Be Honored

Johnson Key To Greatly Encouraging Vaccinations Among Hospital Workforce

BY TRAVIS GULBRANDSON
travis.gulbrandson@yankton.net

In an era when flu immunization rates among health care workers average somewhere between 30-40 percent, Avera Sacred Heart Hospital has a vaccine compliance rate of 92 percent.

This is due in part to the work of Janet Johnson, the hospital's infection control coordinator.

That's why Johnson will be among those honored at a banquet in New Orleans next month by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc., as one of the 2010 Heroes of Infection Prevention.

"It's really nice," she said. "I'm really grateful to the people who thought enough of what I do to nominate me for this award. I'm humbled by it, because there are infection prevention people doing all kinds of wonderful things."

Johnson said it takes three things for people to accept getting an immunization: Convenience, education and fun.

"When I first started in infection prevention in 1989, about 3 percent of our health care workers got the influenza vaccine," she said.

The first thing Johnson did was to remove the immunization charge for the employees, and to



COURTESY PHOTO

Janet Johnson, infection control coordinator at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital, encourages hospital staff to get their annual flu immunization with her character, "Nurse Moonbeam." For her efforts, Johnson is being honored by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, Inc.

increase awareness that shots were available.

"Compliance wasn't really good, even with reminders," she said. "So then I started taking a cart out and tried to talk to health care workers, and go to the place where they are, and make it real convenient for them."

Numbers began to rise, but things really picked up when Johnson created a character called "Nurse Moonbeam" to help in the push for immunization.

Moonbeam — a 1960s-style hippie with vintage clothes and colored hair — has been around ever since.

"We try to make it fun, and tell people to 'stay groovy' and that we're going to 'ban the bug,'" Johnson said. "She's always hitchhiking in from some part of the world to come give the influenza vaccine...."

"I had seen other characters that people had used, but being from the '60s myself, I was thinking of the 'ban the bomb' era, and I thought, 'Well, why not ban the bug?'" she said.

Johnson said Avera Sacred Heart employees responded with higher immunization rates than ever before, with steady growth over time.

"Every year, I've found that the color of Nurse Moonbeam's

hair affects how many people got shots," she said. "They seem to like blue hair better than they do red, so they're more willing to take the vaccine from a blue-haired nurse than a red-haired nurse. For some reason they like her better."

Although she enjoys playing the character, Johnson said she has thought about discontinuing it.

"Sometimes I think, 'Oh, I'm going to abandon the character,'" she said. "But when she doesn't come around, people miss it. Everybody likes to get involved in the fun."

The best part of being Nurse Moonbeam is the education she provides to employees, Johnson said.

"It takes time to explain the facts," she said. "Since health care workers really care about the people they take care of, the thing that probably sells them the most on it is that (vaccination) prevents their patients from getting sick...."

"The idea that they could possibly come to work and make somebody ill is something they don't want to do," she said.

There are still challenges, though — one of which is the proliferation of inaccurate information on the Internet.

"I think information is wonderful, and people should have their questions answered, but sometimes it looks really legitimate and you find out it's been written by a movie star, not a biologist," Johnson said. "That's probably one of the bigger challenges in getting immunizations to people."

Johnson has worked for Avera Sacred Heart Hospital since 1987.

Area Blood Donors Honored For Reaching Key Milestone

BY EMILY NOHR
newsroom@yankton.net

Six people from the Yankton area were recognized recently by the Siouxland Blood Bank for reaching a 10 gallon blood donation milestone in 2009.

Of the 200 blood donors applauded at the May 13 recognition program and dinner in Sioux City, Iowa, five were from Yankton. One donor was from Tripp.

An Iowa man donated the most blood of all: a whopping 40 gallons.

Theresa Arens, a recognized donor from Yankton, has been donating her blood for 30 years at the Avera Sacred Heart Hospital in Yankton. In the last 10 years, she has donated one pint of blood regularly every two months.

To achieve the 10 gallon milestone, Arens had to give blood 80 times.

"I just figure it can help someone who needs blood," Arens said. "I think it's a good idea because it makes me feel better."

Arens' son, Bill, was also recognized for donating 10 gallons of blood. Sometimes Bill donates double reds, which is two pints of blood every four months.

He has donated for over 20 years at the Avera Sacred Heart Hospital.

"The main reason I do it is because maybe some day I'll need blood," Bill Arens said. "I'll feel a lot more comfortable taking someone else's because I've donated."

One of the benefits of donating blood at the Avera Sacred

Heart Hospital is that it stays there and helps its patients and Yankton's community members, said Warren Erickson, director of laboratory services for Avera Sacred Heart Hospital and board member for the Siouxland Community Blood Bank.

"You can't donate 10 gallons of blood in an hour or a week. That's a lifelong commitment, and without people like that, our blood supplies would be short," Erickson added.

According to the Siouxland Blood Bank website, only 37 percent of the U.S. population can donate blood, and less than 10 percent do so annually.

"A lot of people think it hurts," Bill Arens said. "It hurts a little bit, but not too bad. It goes pretty fast, too. Only 20 minutes or so."

Other 10 gallon milestone donors included Scott Hansen, Eileen Honner and Cecelia Nielsen, all of Yankton, and Warren Brown, of Tripp.

The Yankton donors' inspirational achievement is just another reason why other Yankton residents should consider donating during the summer months, a time when blood donations typically drop. In an effort to curb decreased blood donations, the Siouxland Blood Bank is promoting donors to give blood in honor of their community fire and rescue units. The campaign, called "Heroes for Life", will continue through the summer.

The next scheduled mobile blood drive in Yankton will be held June 18 from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at the Yankton Library. Eligible donors must be at least 16 years old, 120 pounds and in good health.

At the top of Harney Peak, he proposed!



Wismer-Likness

Mark and Susan Wismer, Britton, SD, are pleased to announce the engagement of their daughter, Kate Rebecca, to Jordan Likness, son of Arlin and Kris Likness, Yankton, SD.

Kate is a graduate of SDSU with a degree in music education, and is currently a graduate student at Arizona State University in Tempe, AZ.

Jordan will graduate this fall from SDSU with a biology degree, chemistry minor, and education certification.

A wedding is planned for July 2, 2010 in Britton, SD.



Mr. & Mrs. Barta
50th Anniversary
Dick and Marjean (Waltner) Barta will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary from 1-3 p.m. Sunday, June 20, 2010, at Senior Citizens Center, Vermillion, SD. Greetings may be sent to: 202 Catalina, Vermillion, SD 57069.



50th Anniversary
Bill and Wanda Branson of Yankton, SD, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 18, 2010. The couple was married June 18, 1960. They have three children: Lori (Gary) Chadick of Cedar Rapids, IA; Kristi (Eddie) Solis of La Crescenta, CA; and Jodi (Ryan) Flaherty of Corona, CA. The couple has two grandchildren: Jonathan and Jennifer Chadick.

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