Preventive screening saves lives at Wisconsin Farm Tech Days

Two significant threats to the farm population's well-being -- skin cancer and tractor rollovers -- were addressed by the National Farm Medicine Center during its largest outreach event of the year, August 12-14, at Wisconsin Farm Technology Days.

An estimated 12 cases of melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, were detected among 607 people screened, and 70 individuals enrolled in the Wisconsin Rollover Protective Structure (ROPS) Rebate Program.

Twenty-four physicians, allied providers and staff from the Marshfield Clinic Dermatology Department, along with 10 Farm Center scientists and staff, volunteered for the three-day event held near Stevens Point.

"We tried to make it as easy as possible to take advantage of these services," said Tammy Ellis, education outreach specialist at the National Farm Medicine Center. "We had some people tell us that the last time they got screened for skin cancer was when we screened at Farm Tech Days in Clark County (2005) and Marathon County (2011)."

Said Dr. Erik Stratman, Chair of the Clinic Dermatology Department, "I don't think the farming community always seeks timely health care because there is no day off when caring for crops and animals. This screening can provide the push they might need."

Farmers are busy people, said Dr. Alexandra Carley, and screening where they are makes sense. Screenings also are valuable in that they give potential Marshfield Clinic patients a point of access to care, said Dr. Thomas McIntee.

Nationwide, an estimated 76,000 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed this year and an estimated 9,700 people will die from the disease, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Dr. Matthew Keifer, NFMC director, sees Farm Technology Days as a great opportunity for the Farm Center and Marshfield Clinic to cure disease.

“Of all the cancers farmers are at risk for, skin cancer is the No. 1 cancer that can be diagnosed quickly and cured,” Dr. Keifer said.
Another effective intervention in farm safety is installation of a ROPS on a tractor. A rollbar or cab, when used with a seatbelt, is 99 percent effective in preventing death from a rollover. Dr. Barbara Marlenga and Ellis lead the Wisconsin ROPS Rebate Program, which has installed more than 70 ROPS in its first 18 months. The program is funded by donor dollars, and received its start with funding from the annual National Farm Medicine Center Auction of Champions. The program reimburses owners up to 70 percent (maximum of $865) toward the total cost of purchasing, shipping and installing individual ROPS.

The National Farm Medicine Center presence also included a booth featuring resources from the National Children’s Center for Rural and Agricultural Health and Safety. Farm Center activities were part of an expansive Marshfield Clinic presence at Farm Tech Days, representing more than a dozen departments and featuring mammography, vein health, cholesterol, glucose and blood pressure screening, sleep health and other specialties.

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