

June 8, 2008 - System Maps out ways to Improve Diabetes Care

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System maps out ways to improve diabetes care

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A digital mapping system used to identify new retail locations and potential development areas is now being adapted for health care.

The geographic information system maps diabetes cases by address, finding "clusters" of patients to be compared to nearby risk factors, project manager John Dubnansky said from L. Robert Kimball Associates in Ebensburg.

"The goal is to see if there is a correlation," Dubnansky said. "We hope to see why that area might exist."

Kimball and University of Pittsburgh Diabetes Institute are working together to study the diabetes community in a federally funded study covering Rep. John Murtha's 12th Congressional District.

"We have a diabetes epidemic in western Pennsylvania," said Murtha, D-Johnstown. "This study will help identify many of the factors that contribute to the disease, as well as assist in determining the best future locations of treatment and outreach facilities."

Using the same data that a retailer uses to find concentrations of snowmobile owners who might use a new sporting goods store, diabetes researchers can show how far diabetes patients travel for treatment.

The study also will review positive factors, like fitness facilities and healthy food opportunities, graduate researcher Laura Bettencourt said from the diabetes institute. Maps can be developed to show access to walking trails, gyms, fruit markets and fast-food restaurants.

“We can find the best locations for future services,” Bettencourt said.

Although geographic information systems are used to examine regional cancer rates, the local study could be a first.

“This is really the first time that somebody has looked at diabetes using GIS,” Bettencourt said.

Funding for the \$170,000 study is part of the diabetes institute’s ongoing work with the Air Force to improve access to diabetes care and treatment in western Pennsylvania, while developing a model for diabetes treatment for the Air Force.

The program received \$20 million this year.