

LHC hopes to boost takers for free services

By Camden Easterling

Enterprise Staff Writer

In an age where talk about rising health care costs can seem as common as chatting about the weather, you'd think giving away services would be a breeze.

Not so much, says Sandi Marlowe, Livingston Health-Care's community development director.

LHC staff members in recent months have been promoting the free breast health services the organization offers — but surprisingly few women are taking them up on the offer, Marlowe said.

In July LHC, which oper-

ates Livingston Memorial Hospital and numerous medical offices in town, received a grant to fund a breast cancer awareness campaign plus help women obtain breast cancer screenings.

The \$20,000 grant came from the Montana affiliate of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure, a Texas-based nonprofit group that funds breast cancer research and community outreach efforts. The grant covers breast cancer screenings for women in Park, Sweet Grass and Meagher counties.

Since the summer, LHC has provided free mammograms and breast ultrasounds for uninsured and underinsured

women.

In November, LHC began offering free clinical breast exams to any woman who wants one. The exams are recommended every three years for women under 40 and annually for women 40 and older, Marlowe said.

During such an exam, a health care professional physically examines a patient's breasts for lumps or changes.

LHC had estimated it would provide 100 mammograms and similar services by July 2010. But summer is approaching, and only about 25 women have come in for the free services, Marlowe said.

Similarly, LHC thought it would have roughly 100 women come in for free clinical breast exams within the first year they were offered. But LHC has seen fewer than five patients in the last six months, Marlowe said.

Getting the word out about the free services is taking longer than LHC expected, she said.

"Plus, I think what we're learning is that there might be more than financial barriers," Marlowe said of thinking that free services would increase the number of women making efforts to detect breast cancer.

LHC staff members have found that many women also

need educating about how crucial breast exams and screenings can be in finding cancer, she said.

"And there are a lot of misconceptions out there," Marlowe said.

For example, some women say they're taking steps to prevent breast cancer and consequently don't need to be checked, Marlowe said.

Other women think that because they do breast self-examinations, they won't benefit from a medical professional administering a similar check. But professionals often find lumps or other abnormalities much sooner and when they are much smaller than when a

woman looks for them on her own, Marlowe said.

LHC hopes more women will begin taking advantage of free breast health services that the Komen grant has made possible, Marlowe said.

For information on how to schedule a free clinical breast exam or apply for other free breast health services, call 823-6261 or go to www.livingstonhealthcare.org. Look on the right side of the page under the news and events section.