Diabetes Foot Program

...A Model Disease Management Service at Earl K. Long Medical Center

There are an estimated 340,000 diabetics in Louisiana and approximately 1,000 lower extremity amputations occur each year. Within four years, 50 percent will have a second amputation. And, the five-year mortality rate is as high as 68 percent. During the past 20 years, little improvement had been seen in the incidence of such amputations here and elsewhere in the country because comprehensive prevention strategies had not been widely applied.

This omission in the cycle of care for diabetes patients is being addressed by the Earl K. Long Medical Center Diabetes Foot Program. The goals of the program are to reduce amputations, foot complications and hospitalizations of such patients. Funded partially by a five-year grant from the Federal Bureau of Primary Health Care, the Diabetes Foot Program serves as the hub for a statewide network of State Public Hospitals and Community Health Centers. It is the lead center in a four state LEAP program (Lower Extremity Amputation Prevention).

The program trains staff at the State Public Hospitals in a three-level education program that is also available to public and private providers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. Thus far, more than 200 nurses, nurse practitioners, physical therapists, podiatrists and physicians have been certified in Level I LEAP. Two weeks of hands-on work with patients at our Baton Rouge-based clinic is part of the program.

Exceptional patient care, vital research, educational emphasis and collaborative activities that cross State borders are all components of a standout program at the Earl K. Long Medical Center Diabetes Foot Program.

Results are Encouraging

The first year data reported as part of a five-year outcome-based research study are very encouraging and strongly suggest the advantage of disease management programs, both to patients and cost-conscious health care providers. Of approximately 800 patients receiving comprehensive foot management care, studies from these patients show:

- 50% decrease in days with ulceration;
- 90% decrease in foot-related hospitalizations;
- 80% decrease in foot-related emergency room visits; and
- 90% reduction in foot surgery and lower extremity amputations.