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1-13-2017

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Recommended Citation

Office of University Communications, "GWU Hunt School of Nursing Professor Shares Tips for Navigating Cold and Flu Season" (2017). *Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive*. 706.
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GWU Hunt School of Nursing Professor Shares Tips for Navigating Cold and Flu Season

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Office of University
Communications

January 13, 2017

Dr. Anna Hamrick Discusses Viral Infection Prevention, Recovery

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Cold and flu season has arrived with a vengeance, and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Ga., are reporting widespread outbreaks of influenza in North Carolina. As classes reconvene in countless educational institutions, officials warn that the spread of germs is likely to increase.

Dr. Anna Hamrick is a practicing healthcare provider and serves as an assistant professor and is the director of the Family Nurse Practitioner program at Gardner-Webb. She offers some helpful tips and advice for those who may find themselves fighting sickness or who are around others who may already be infected.

“The best offense is a really good defense, so prevention is key. Especially when we are talking about the flu,” Hamrick shared. “You hear it every year. Most people listen, but many do not follow the recommendations from the CDC to get a flu shot.”

While the flu is always a concern during the winter months, upper respiratory infections, allergies, and bouts with the common cold are also more frequent when the weather is colder and people tend to stay indoors. Hamrick stresses the importance of disinfecting household surfaces that are often neglected. “We’re all pretty good about cleaning the sinks and countertops, but think about the light switches, the door knobs, toilet handles, and other places where bacteria like to sit and breed,” she encouraged. “Frequent hand washing with warm, soapy water is the most important thing you can do to avoid the spread of germs.”

All too often, sickness cannot be avoided. Common symptoms of illness include fever, cough, chills, sore throat, runny nose, and upper respiratory congestion. “One of the things I think a lot of people struggle with is how to pick the right medicine to take care of yourself,” Hamrick observed. “If you walk down the aisle at the pharmacy, it can be challenging to know what to pick up. We see a lot of people mixing medications to help relieve different symptoms when, in fact, the active ingredient is very similar.”

Hamrick warns people to be aware that many over-the-counter medications have maximum dosages that can be taken in a 24-hour period. “I think when people feel bad, they think ‘more is better,’” she suggested. “That might not be the case. There can be potential side effects—like damage to kidneys, liver, or stomach—when you’re taking large doses. So you really want to pay attention to the directions on the label.”

While many people turn to the Internet for advice, Hamrick suggests making sure that the web sites offering the information are reliable. “WebMD is a reputable site,” she shared, “but blogs and social media accounts aren’t necessarily trustworthy resources when you are considering medications to put into your body. So if you have questions, talk to your healthcare provider or local pharmacist, or use dependable online sources.”

One of the easiest tips for recovering from illness is to remember to drink plenty of fluids. “Hydration is really important when you’re battling these types of sicknesses,” Hamrick reported. “Many of the over-the-counter medications have ingredients that help with congestion and removing mucus, but you’ve got to keep yourself hydrated. Lots of fluid intake will help you recover more quickly and get you back on your feet.”

To hear the full WGWG.org interview with Dr. Hamrick, click below:

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University’s purpose is to advance the Kingdom of God through Christian higher education by preparing graduates for professional and personal success, instilling in them a deep commitment to service and leadership, and equipping them for well-rounded lives of lasting impact, Pro Deo et Humanitate (For God and Humanity).