Perinatal Outreach Educator Networks (POENs) are generally funded by individual states to provide perinatal (the care offered to a mother and child just before and just after birth) medical education to health care providers in the region, enhancing the quality of care for mothers and infants and reducing morbidity and mortality. Specialists share their experience and knowledge with other physicians and community hospitals across regions by offering or facilitating programs such as physician and nurse consultation services, continuing education for health care professionals, emergency medical transport for referring hospitals within the region, consultation and technical assistance on emerging perinatal issues, and sometimes even lending libraries.

For example, in Illinois, there are 10 perinatal centers designated by the state. Rush Hospital in Chicago is home to the the largest network, involving 18 hospitals delivering more than 30,000 infants. The Rush Perinatal Center maintains a 24-hour hotline to facilitate the transfer of high-risk mothers and infants. Through the perinatal center, Rush offers an extensive series of classes for physicians, nurses and other health professionals. Other centers are housed out of the Other centers are housed out of the University of Chicago Perinatal Center; John H. Stroeger, Jr. Hospital of Cook County Perinatal Center; Northwestern/Childrens/Evanston Perinatal Center; University of Illinois /Christ Perinatal Center; Loyola University Perinatal Center; Northwest Illinois Perinatal Center - Rockford Memorial Hospital; North Central Perinatal Center - St. Francis Hospital; South Central Illinois Perinatal Center - St. John’s Hospital; Southern Illinois Perinatal Network - SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center and SSM St. Mary’s Health Center.

These regional networks have been widely credited as one of the principle reasons for the rapid decline in neonatal mortality rates in the last several decades. Although, the other principal reason is the introduction in the late 1980s of surfactant replacement therapy, which reduced the incidence of lung disease in newborns.

In Illinois, especially the Chicago area, Preeclampsia Foundation volunteers have been making presentations about the Foundation to various perinatal networks. These volunteers share their stories and information about resources available through the Foundation. They also ask for input on what additional materials would be helpful. From these discussions came the development of a unique HELLP syndrome seminar involving a point-counterpoint type of presentation contrasting the input of Dr. Judith Hibbard of the University of Illinois-Chicago against that of HELLP survivors' real world experiences. As a result of these presentations, orders for the Foundation's patient education materials have increased tremendously. These interactions have also provided good opportunities for raising awareness about upcoming Promise Walks for Preeclampsia™.

Debbie Schy from Advocate Lutheran General Hospital is one of the current co-chairs of the Perinatal Outreach Educators of Illinois and has attended presentations from Foundation volunteers. "We're so appreciative of the volunteers from the Foundation," said Schy. "They are a phenomenal group and we are lucky to have you here."

The Foundation is working with local volunteers to take the success we've enjoyed in Illinois to other major markets across the nation.