Research, though scant, has shown that lack of patient information is correlated to poor health outcomes. Our own research shows that fewer than half of pregnant women are educated about the signs and symptoms of preeclampsia by their health care providers.

Not surprisingly, patient education is high on our list of priorities.

There are many opportunities where pregnant women come in contact with health care professionals – not just their primary physician, but the childbirth educators, doulas, midwives, and nurses they see in clinics, hospitals and medical offices. Each of these encounters is an opportunity to provide and reinforce information about the warning signs of preeclampsia: why it's important to be attentive to those signs and what action to take. Our campaign, "Patient Education in the Continuum of Care," recognizes that, besides physicians, other care providers may have more time, skills and orientation to provide effective patient education.

Thanks to a grant from the Beckman Coulter Foundation, we undertook several strategies in 2010 to focus on patient education along this continuum of care. Using a professional display unit, staff and volunteers exhibited at four medical conferences this year to provide our patient education materials to nurse-midwives (ACNM), doulas (DONA), childbirth educators (ICEA) and women's health and obstetric nurses (AWHONN).

The Foundation did receive an overwhelmingly positive response from the attendees of these events. Educators were particularly excited about the availability of the Preeclampsia Foundation as a provider of patient support and credible education materials.

These and other events also allowed the Preeclampsia Foundation to survey health care professionals about their attitudes and behaviors with respect to preeclampsia education for

patients. With 324 responses from a wide-variety of educators, an overwhelming 81% of respondents reported that “All pregnant women are at risk so they should all know the warning signs and what to do if they have concerns.”

Unfortunately, only 56% out of the 324 respondents reported that they “provide it [preeclampsia education] to all their patients.” The most frequently listed patient education barriers were that educators “don’t have enough time to educate” or that “materials are not written at a low enough education level.”

Low literacy has become an increasingly distressing issue in the medical world, and one which the Preeclampsia Foundation is working to find a solution. Partnering with researchers from Northwestern University, the Foundation is developing low-literacy education tool that will also, with new funding sources, be translated into a variety of languages. The tool will be available to all medical providers as one more tool to reach a larger audience, including global low-resource settings.

The Preeclampsia Foundation plans to continue the Continuum of Care project through 2011, attending and presenting at childbirth educator conferences, launching our low literacy pamphlet and increasing our outreach efforts to professionals through the advent of our new website content. As is always the case with spreading awareness, there is always more work to be done.