

Online directory helps uninsured New Yorkers acquire health care services

MS. P. WAS STRUGGLING TO MANAGE HER DIABETES. A 43-year-old domestic worker, she had no health insurance and had not had a check-up since 2003.

Ms. P. sought help at a community center in East Harlem, where a social worker logged on to the Health Information Tool for Empowerment, or H.I.T.E. The first online directory of health and social services designed for uninsured and underinsured New Yorkers, the site – www.hitesite.org – lists thousands of government, nonprofit and privately sponsored programs and services available to underserved individuals.

More than three million New Yorkers – many of them employed – lack health insurance.

Within minutes, the social worker had located two clinics in Ms. P.'s ZIP code with a sliding scale for fees. She also found a program that provided free diabetes medications to low-income patients and helped Ms. P. complete the application.

There are more than three million people in New York State like Ms. P. who lack health insurance, said Rima Cohen, vice president of the Greater New York Hospital Foundation, which developed H.I.T.E. "The majority of them are employed – many full time – but still cannot afford coverage for themselves and their families."

To overcome the problem, the not-for-profit hospital foundation – created in 1978 to conduct research and carry out special projects for its

more than 250 hospitals, long-term care facilities and other members – established the digital clearinghouse. It enables social workers, nurses, physicians and other health care providers to identify national, state and local programs available to their low-income clients.

"H.I.T.E. includes software designed to pre-screen the uninsured and determine their eligibility for New York's three publicly funded health insurance programs for low-income residents: Medicaid, Child Health Plus and Family Health Plus," said Ms. Cohen, who directed the program. "Results generated by the software guide potential enrollees through the application process."

