

Fighting childhood obesity one community at a time

By ACSH Staff — April 30, 2013

KIDS FANS or type unknown
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On Thursday, April 25th, **Stamford Hospital** in Stamford, Conn., held a conference entitled **Changing the Community: A Symposium on Childhood Obesity**. The one-day conference included presentations by three speakers, as well as two workshop sessions.

The keynote speaker, Dr. William Dietz, former director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity in the Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion at the CDC, highlighted the increased costs of obesity today as opposed to 1998. He proposed areas that he believes should be targeted in fighting this epidemic, including reducing energy intake, increasing energy expenditure and focusing on pregnant women in terms of weight gain, diabetes and smoking. He also discussed how time and money should be invested to achieve change in those areas. As well as emphasizing a continued focus on evidence, disparities, early care and education and parenting, he suggested that change needs to come from communities, from the bottom up.

Dr. Jeanette Ickovics, a professor of epidemiology, public health and psychology at Yale University, also emphasized the idea that community change matters. She focused mainly on programs being implemented at New Haven, Conn., public schools, highlighting the findings that children who feel they are part of a positive school climate have lower BMIs. In her experience, strengthening schools is at the heart of health.

Dr. Madhu Mathur, spoke about the program she runs in Stamford, called Kids FANS (Fitness and Nutrition Services). The message behind this program is 5-2-1-0 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 2 hours (max) of screen time, 1 hour of moderate physical activity and 0 sugary drinks. Through involving the schools, the parents and the children in a program that includes nutrition education, physical activity, and meetings with a social worker, Kids FANS seeks to achieve the 5-2-1-0 goal and ensure the continued health of its participants. And they have seen decreases in the BMIs of the participants. However, Dr. Mathur did say that in some cases, it was hard for the families to sustain this change once they finished with the program, an issue that they are working to resolve.

In addition to the speakers, two workshops were held. The first focused on how to influence healthy eating and featured a dietitian who works with a local supermarket, a dietitian who works with the Stamford school system and a coordinator of special services in downtown Stamford. All highlighted the ways in which they work with their clients to make healthy food accessible and appealing, including taste tests for students and working directly with families to come up with healthy meals. The second workshop focused on community engagement and further emphasized

Dr. Dietz's message: It's all about what the community is doing. A highlight of this workshop was Amy Kalafa, a mother and the filmmaker of *Two Angry Moms*, who showed how much influence parents can have in a school.

ACSH's associate director of public health, Ariel Savransky, who attended the conference, says, It's really inspiring to see what Stamford is doing as a community to ensure the kids are healthy. Through emphasizing the collaboration of parents, schools, teachers and doctors, all those involved will hopefully be more invested in the program and eventually be able to sustain healthy changes. I could not agree more that individual communities play an integral part in fighting this epidemic.

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