

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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MEDICAL STUDENTS FIGHT SMOKING WITH 'TAR WARS'

DALLAS – February 23, 2000 – Medical students at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas are returning to elementary school this spring.

As part of a program called Tar Wars, the students are visiting Dallas elementary schools and talking to pre-teens about the dangers of smoking.

Armed with visual displays, telling statistics and tips on how to say "No," the medical students hope to convince the young students in the audience to avoid starting the dangerous habit.

Tar Wars, a national program that began in Denver in 1988, is run by the American Academy of Family Practice. At UT Southwestern, members of the Family Practice Student Association run the program. The group visits local schools each spring.

Tar Wars' UT Southwestern student leaders are Davina Franco and Rachael Sweek, first-year medical students.

"We have to take the no-smoking message down to their level," Sweek said. "We talk about the specific health risks that could affect them if they choose to smoke."

The hour-long presentations teach kids about why people use tobacco, the short-term effects of tobacco and how advertising is directed at kids.

Using lifelike models of diseased lungs, the medical students don't mind making a few fourth-grade stomachs turn.

Tommie Farrell, a fourth-year medical student, has participated in the program for two years.

"From a preventive health standpoint, smoking is the No. 1 health issue," Farrell said. "Take out smoking, and you've eliminated the No. 1 risk factor for heart disease and lowered lung-cancer deaths significantly."

"It is easier to never start smoking than to have to stop smoking."

Targeting fourth- and fifth-grade students is the best strategy, since reaching kids at a younger age means a greater chance of influencing them before they face peer pressure to

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smoke, Franco said.

"It's fun talking to the kids, but we're also passing on a serious message," she said. "The younger they are, the more they listen to us rather than to their peers."

Tar Wars also sponsors a poster contest. Entries are due April 23, and local winners will be announced by May 3. Winning entries will go on to a statewide contest.

Send poster contest entries to UT Southwestern, Tar Wars, Family Practice Student Association, 5323 Harry Hines Blvd., Dallas, Texas 75390-9067.

For more information on the poster contest or Tar Wars, call Christine Keenan, education coordinator for family practice and community medicine at UT Southwestern, at 214-648-6495.

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