

### **Future physicians to DISD students: ‘Eat more fruits and vegetables’**

DALLAS – Sept. 30, 2009 – Getting children to eat more fruits and vegetables can be a hard sell. But that’s exactly what a group of UT Southwestern Medical School students aims to do.

Beginning today, seven third-year medical students will fan out across the Dallas Independent School District to talk to third-, fourth- and fifth-graders about the importance of consuming at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.

Dr. Linda Michalsky, assistant professor of clinical nutrition and the obesity-prevention outreach coordinator at UT Southwestern Medical Center, said that although federal law requires that school districts offer fruits and vegetables at lunch, it is up to each student to choose what goes on his or her plate.

“We want to get the kids to select fruits and vegetables,” said Dr. Michalsky, who developed the program – called Balancing Exercise and Nutrition for Students (BEANS) – in cooperation with DISD’s Nutrition Services department. “Research has shown that children who eat a healthy, balanced diet with a variety of fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products become adults who do the same. While a single program may not cause immediate behavior change, hearing a consistent message will help.”

The title of this program, the first in a series, is called “Getting Enough Fruits and Vegetables.”

The Power Point presentation takes about 20 minutes. Students each receive an electronic clicker at the beginning of the presentation so they can answer half a dozen multiple-choice questions, much like the television show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. The clickers will record the answers so that researchers can track in real time whether students grasp a concept as well as whether they intend to eat more produce.

The questions include:

- Are fresh fruits and vegetables always better for you than canned, frozen or dried?
- How many fruits and vegetables should you eat each day?
- How can you eat more fruits and vegetables?

UT Southwestern piloted this program last spring. More than 450 students at three Dallas elementary schools participated in the pilot phase.

Dr. Michalsky said the presentation itself is the result of a cooperative effort by students, faculty

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and staff associated with the medical school, UT Southwestern School of Health Professions and UT Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences.

The plan, Dr. Michalsky said, is to develop a series of presentations targeting each component of the American Medical Association's recommendations to combat childhood obesity. Other recommendations include limiting sugary drinks, watching TV less than two hours a day and eating breakfast daily.

"We want to promote behavior change," she said. "Although we want to address knowledge and misinformation such as the idea that fresh fruits and vegetables are always best, our ultimate goal is to promote self-efficacy and reduce obesity."

Dr. Scott Grundy, director of the Center for Human Nutrition and chairman of clinical nutrition, said community outreach is a vital component of the obesity, diabetes and metabolic disease research under way at UT Southwestern.

"Our hope is that by partnering with the DISD, we'll be able to have a real impact on the community in terms of reducing childhood obesity," Dr. Grundy said. "Not every student who participates in the program will start asking for fruits and vegetables, but there will be a few who adjust their eating habits as a result of this program. We want to promote this type of behavior change."

The obesity-prevention outreach program falls under the umbrella of UT Southwestern's Taskforce for Obesity Research. In 2007, the multidisciplinary group received a \$22 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to enhance its efforts to attack obesity from every angle.

The award is one of nine interdisciplinary research consortia sponsored by the NIH Roadmap for Medical Research, a series of initiatives designed to transform the nation's medical research capabilities. The UT Southwestern group is the only one focused on obesity.

UT Southwestern, which receives state legislative funding for this outreach program, also is partnering with the Dallas Area Coalition to Prevent Childhood Obesity, a nonprofit organization co-sponsored by Children's Medical Center Dallas and the Community Council of Greater Dallas.

Visit <http://www.utsouthwestern.org/nutrition> to learn more about UT Southwestern's clinical services in nutrition.

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