

# The Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center

## *Newsflash*

### Spring 2017 Issue

The PRC has prepared this electronic **Newsflash** to keep you informed about our work and invite you to take part in our research, education and outreach activities. It serves as a communication tool for our Community Committee members, and our colleagues in academia, education, clinical settings, and social service agencies. If you have ideas for working together on shared projects, please let us know.

#### **For more information about the Yale-Griffin PRC:**

Please visit our website at <http://www.yalegriffinprc.org>

### *PRC Updates*

**Our annual Community Committee meeting** was held on March 8<sup>th</sup>. New members included: Sharon Ellis, President/COO of the Valley United Way; Victoria Costales MD, MPH, Associate Program Director of Griffin Hospital's Residency Program and Director of Griffin Hospital's Center for Prevention and Lifestyle Management; Caty Poole, Executive Director of Massaro Community Farm; and local chef/instructor Audra Weisel. VITAHLS working group members were invited to attend as well. We provided updates on our operations and partnerships, clinical research studies, website re-design, and VITAHLS activities. We also provided updates on activities conducted as part of our CHOOSE core research project, including: children's cooking classes at the Valley YMCA; plans for an online physical activity resource guide for local residents; and plans to pilot test a fruit & vegetable prescription program with Griffin Hospital employees whose children are enrolled in school districts involved in the VITAHLS initiative.

**Welcome to public health interns:** Three undergraduate students from Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) are spending this semester at the PRC on shared tasks related to the VITAHLS initiative and on the creation of a physical activity resource guide as part of the CHOOSE core research project.

- **Amanda Erlwein** did an internship at Data Haven and has volunteered at Yale New Haven Hospital. She is applying her interest in geographic information system (GIS) to an undergraduate thesis on a geospatial analysis of bicycle infrastructure and safety on the SCSU campus.
- **Joshua Licursi** is involved in student leadership at SCSU, and recently travelled to Guatemala as part of an international field studies experience through SCSU. In addition to public health, he has interests in graphic design, social media marketing, film production, and community theater.
- **Nolan Rourke** has taken part in qualitative research projects at SCSU focusing on texting and driving, and on student tobacco use. Last summer, he took part in a National Institute of Drug Abuse summer research internship program through the Yale School of Medicine.

### *Current Projects*

**UPDATE - Valley Initiative to Advance Health & Learning in Schools (VITAHLS)**

This initiative, led by the PRC and Griffin Hospital in partnership with school and community partners, aims to develop, implement, evaluate, and sustain comprehensive school-based programming focusing on nutrition and physical activity for PreK-12 students. Our school partners are the Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, Shelton and Naugatuck school districts, and Emmett O'Brien Regional Technical School. For more information, contact VITAHLS Coordinator Kim Doughty (email [kim.doughty@yalegriffinprc.org](mailto:kim.doughty@yalegriffinprc.org)).

**Healthy Cooking Challenge:** Plans for our fourth annual Healthy Cooking Challenge are underway, with participating school districts' food service directors serving on the planning committee. This year's theme is "healthy comfort foods." Middle school students have been invited to create and submit recipes, with each district selecting finalists who compete within their district in March and/or April. District winners will then compete in the overall challenge scheduled to take place on Tuesday, May 23<sup>rd</sup> from 5:00 to 7:00 pm in the Griffin Hospital cafeteria. The students' families will be invited to watch the contest and sample the food. All finalists in the May contest will receive gift baskets with educational and fun prizes, with the winner receiving additional prizes as well.

### **UPDATE – Community Health Opportunities Organized with Schools at the Epicenter (CHOOSE)**

Our core research project for this 5-year CDC funding cycle expands within/beyond VITAHLS school districts to include other health promotion "portals" as well in their respective communities.

**Physical Activity Resource Guide** – The physical activity resource guide working group has been busy formalizing plans for this guide, which is intended to serve as an online CHOOSE community portal. Our partners include the Naugatuck Valley Health District (NVHD), the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG), the Naugatuck River Greenway Committee, and the Valley YMCA, and our goals for the guide are to: (1) feature free and/or low-cost resources for physical activity; (2) make this information available free of charge to residents of our target communities; and (3) include text descriptions along with maps to show the location of the resources. Resources to potentially feature include: community parks; state parks; nature centers; greenways; trails for walking, hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing; community recreation centers; athletic fields; basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts; walking/running tracks at local schools; public playgrounds; public pools; skating rinks and ponds; skateboard parks; places to paddle, canoe, or kayak; and resources available to people with disabilities. Target communities include Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Derby, Naugatuck, Oxford, Seymour, and Shelton, which are in Griffin Hospital's primary service area and are also members of the NVCOG. The NVCOG has expertise in geographic information systems (GIS) mapping, and has agreed to contribute in-kind staffing to help create and host an online portal for physical activity resource information and maps. For more information, contact Judy Treu (email [judy.treu@yalegriffinprc.org](mailto:judy.treu@yalegriffinprc.org), phone 203-732-1371).

### **NEW RESEARCH – Multiple Sclerosis Pilot Studies**

Griffin Hospital has received \$1.3 million from Connecticut's Biomedical Research Trust Fund to conduct multiple sclerosis research, and the PRC has been asked to administer the grant and partner with Joseph Guarnaccia, MD, Director of the Multiple Sclerosis Treatment Center at Griffin Hospital, to develop and conduct up to 3 pilot studies. The first study, **A Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Study of Mindfulness Meditation in Treating Insomnia in Multiple Sclerosis**, is designed to examine whether Mindfulness Meditation is more effective than standard sleep hygiene counseling in treating insomnia in MS patients. Many MS patients suffer from chronic insomnia, leading to daytime impairment. Treatments for MS, as well as for MS-related symptoms, may also contribute to insomnia. Benzodiazepines and other medications to manage insomnia may have adverse effects such as dependence/tolerance, cognitive dysfunction, and depression. Therefore, it is desirable to find effective nonpharmacological treatments for insomnia in MS patients. Prior research has shown some benefits of mindfulness techniques in treating insomnia in general, and some benefits of stress reduction techniques in managing MS-related insomnia. To date, however, there have been no studies on the efficacy of mindfulness techniques in treating MS-related insomnia. Once we receive formal approval from the Griffin Hospital Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin this study, we will begin recruiting participants and will share more details on this study.

## **UPDATE - Community Alliance for Research and Engagement (CARE)**

CARE, based in New Haven, extends the PRC's work with a mission to improve health in New Haven.

**New Haven Health Leaders Program** – CARE will offer a leadership program for students, faculty, and New Haven residents to work together on solutions to social and health issues identified by the community. It will be open to faculty and graduate students in the Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) School of Health and Human Services and to residents of low-income communities that neighbor the SCSU campus. Students will co-learn with faculty and residents about Community-Based Participatory Research and community organizing methods. Students will work alongside the resident partners to build relationships with other neighborhood leaders and residents and community organizations. Together, they will build health initiatives for community change.

**Community Garden Program** - CARE and the SCSU Office of Sustainability are partnering with New Haven Farms to expand its community garden, currently coordinated through the Office of Sustainability, and will host New Haven residents to grow food and learn about health and wellness. In this first year, CARE will pilot a health and wellness summer program with residents from neighborhoods adjacent to SCSU. Families will be invited to the garden for weekly cooking demonstrations, nutrition classes, and gardening seminars during July and August. Each week, participants will take home fresh produce, along with culturally relevant, affordable, and nutritious recipes. The modified Farm-Based Wellness Program will serve 7 to 10 New Haven families.

**Save the Date!** A CARE 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Fundraiser will be held on Friday, June 9, 2017 from 6:00-9:00 p.m. at mActivity, 285 Nicoll St, New Haven. For more information, contact: [care@southernct.edu](mailto:care@southernct.edu).

## ***Grant Proposals and Awards***

### **RECENTLY-SUBMITTED PROPOSALS**

- ***Effect of Macadamia Consumption on Endothelial Function and Cardio-metabolic Risk Factors in Adults at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes: A Randomized, Controlled, Crossover Trial***

In February, we submitted a proposal to the INC International Nut and Dried Fruit Council Foundation for a randomized, single-blind, controlled, crossover study to examine the health effects of including macadamia nuts in the diets of 28 adults at risk for Type 2 diabetes. This study will compare the effects of adding 60 grams (about 2 oz.) of macadamia nuts per day to their usual diets for 8 weeks, vs. eating their usual diets for 8 weeks, on their endothelial function (a marker of cardiovascular risk), blood lipids, body composition, body weight, waist circumference, insulin sensitivity, C-reactive protein (a measure of inflammation), and diet quality. Macadamias are rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Among all the nuts, they have the highest content of monounsaturated fats, known to have favorable effects on cardiovascular health, blood glucose control, insulin sensitivity, waist circumference, and weight loss or maintenance. Prior research attests to the health benefits of consuming nuts (which have a substantial amount of monounsaturated fats) for people at risk for diabetes and/or cardiovascular disease. Our own research has shown that including walnuts in the diets of adults with Type 2 diabetes, or at risk Type 2 diabetes, can improve endothelial function. However, thus far there are limited data on the effects of macadamias on cardio-metabolic health.

- ***Evaluation of School-based Health Services on Student Outcomes in Students with Chronic Health Conditions***

In February, we submitted this school-based health proposal to the CDC for a Special Interest Project Competitive Supplements (SIPS) grant. This project will evaluate the process of initiating or expanding school health services using community partnerships to improve management of the most prevalent chronic health conditions (CHCs) among middle school students in 3 public school districts (Ansonia,

Derby, and Shelton). CHCs such as obesity and asthma are prevalent and costly among U.S. children and adolescents. Their prevalence in this age group has more than doubled in recent years. Obesity is the most prevalent condition, followed by “other physical conditions” and asthma. There are significant disparities in CHCs according to race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The proposed project expands our VITAHLs-related work with 3 of these districts from primary prevention of obesity to secondary and tertiary levels of prevention. Our partner schools have identified asthma as another prevalent health condition among their students. During year 1, we will conduct a needs assessment to explore the feasibility and potential benefits and drawbacks of a variety of strategies, to include expansion of services delivered in schools by school nursing staff, referral by school nursing staff to community-based health care providers, and/or delivery of services in schools by community-based providers. We will then develop an intervention in conjunction with our school and community partners. During year 2, we will implement the selected strategies while closely monitoring activities and collecting data on both process and outcomes measures, with the ultimate goal of demonstrating both feasibility and effectiveness of the community partnership and the intervention itself.

## Presentations

**David Katz, MD, MPH, FACPM, FACP**, PRC Director, delivered several presentations:

- *Knowing What to Eat; Refusing to Swallow It* on December 1<sup>st</sup> at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Forum on Food & Nutrition held at the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition in Milan, Italy.
- Presentation in January at FoodFluence 2017 in Vienna, Austria.
- *Lifestyle is the Medicine: What's the Spoon?* on February 24<sup>th</sup> at the Integrative Healthcare Symposium in New York, NY.
- *Food and Health in the Modern World – The Cost of Convenience* on February 14<sup>th</sup> at the Food Values International Conference: The Renaissance of the Mediterranean Diet and Its Significance for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century World in Vatican City, Italy.
- *Nutrition and Cardiovascular Disease: Scientific Clinical Review of the Trials - The Influence of Nutrition on the Prevention and Treatment of CHD and MI* on March 2<sup>nd</sup> at the Metabolic Medical Institute Symposium in Las Vegas, NV.
- *Knowing What to Eat; Refusing to Swallow It* on March 11<sup>th</sup> at the University Hospitals Primary Care Institute, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH.
- *Lifestyle is the Medicine: What's the Spoon?* on March 20<sup>th</sup> at the Asian Society of Lifestyle Medicine 2017 Inaugural Conference in Taipei, Taiwan.
- *Nutrition and Nutrient Confusion: On the History and Science Behind What to Eat To Solve Our Obesity and Health Epidemics* on March 25<sup>th</sup> at the Ivy League Vegan Conference at Harvard University in Cambridge, MA.

## Publications

- Barnard ND, **Katz DL**. *Building on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Success: Conquering Hunger, Improving Health*. Am J Prev Med. 2017Feb;52(2S2):S103-S105.
- **Njike VY, Ayettey RG**, Rajebi H, **Treu JA, Katz DL**. *Egg Ingestion in Adults with Type 2 Diabetes: Effects on Glycemic Control, Anthropometry, and Diet Quality - A Randomized, Controlled, Crossover Trial*. BMJ Open Diabetes Res Care. 2016 Dec 22;4(1):e000281.
- Shuval K, Leonard T, Drope J, **Katz DL**, Patel AV, Maitin-Shepard M, Amir O, Grinstein A. *Physical Activity Counseling in Primary Care: Insights from Public Health and Behavioral Economics*. CA Cancer J Clin. 2017 Feb 15. [Epub ahead of print] Review.

## *In-Service / Training Opportunities*

You are invited to join us at our **Journal Club meetings or other professional development sessions**, usually held every other month. We review and critique publications on topics such as community-based research, clinical research, and public health. This helps us stay up-to-date on research findings. It also allows us to examine publications (for the research questions, study design, results and conclusions) so we can apply the knowledge gained and lessons learned to the design of our own projects. Occasionally, we devote these sessions to reviewing recent findings from our own studies.

**Our next meeting will be held at the PRC on the second floor of Griffin Hospital.**

- **Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.**

Johnson DB, Podrabsky M, Rocha A, Otten JJ. *Effect of the Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act on the Nutritional Quality of Meals Selected by Students and School Lunch Participation Rates*. JAMA Pediatr. 2016 Jan;170(1):e153918. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.3918.

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Valentine Njike by email at [valentine.njike@yalegriffinprc.org](mailto:valentine.njike@yalegriffinprc.org), or by phone at 203-732-1265 ext. 304.

## *Let's Stay in Touch*

We want to hear from you – let us know what you are doing and how our research might assist you in your work. Please contact Beth Comerford, MS, Deputy Director ([beth.comerford@yalegriffinprc.org](mailto:beth.comerford@yalegriffinprc.org)) or any of the staff listed in this **Newsflash**.

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***Healthier Communities Together***

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