

WHAT'S HAPPENING

A newsletter for the Maine Medical Center family

MMP Pediatrics Collaborates with Preble Street to Prevent Hunger



Brian Youth, M.D., is among the MMP physicians now screening young patients for food insecurity.

As a result of a partnership with the Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative (MHI), pediatric primary care practices with Maine Medical Partners (MMP) now have the ability to screen for

food insecurity and refer patients to resources to relieve hunger. The “Hunger Vital Sign” has been incorporated into MMP’s electronic health record system and is starting to be

implemented into practice workflows.

Developed by Children’s HealthWatch and endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Hunger Vital Sign allows physicians to screen patients quickly for food insecurity and intervene with appropriate referrals. Patients screening positive for food insecurity will be connected with USDA Federal Nutrition Programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and local charitable food programs providing plentiful, healthy food options for families.

“Many Maine families struggle with hunger, and the effects on children can be profound,” said MHI

Program Manager Michelle Lamm. “This is a powerful step to ensuring food insecure families have regular access to healthy meal options.”

“Maine has the third highest rate of food insecurity in the country,” says Julia Bergquist, a social work student interning at MMP – Westbrook Pediatrics. “It is estimated that 20-25 percent of children in Maine meet the definition of food insecure.” Children living in food insecure homes are more susceptible to health problems including anemia, asthma, obesity and mental health issues.

*‘Hunger Prevention’
Continued on Back*

Senator Susan Collins Visits Patients, Receives Award at MMC

U.S. Senator Susan Collins came to The Barbara Bush Children’s Hospital at Maine Medical Center (BBCH) to receive a national award from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and visit with patients and families. The Excellence in Public Service Award is the AAP’s highest honor bestowed to a public servant for distinguished service to the nation’s

infants, children, adolescents and young adults.

Jennifer Jewell, M.D., a pediatrician at BBCH and board member of the AAP’s Maine Chapter, presented the Senator with the award.

*‘Sen. Collins visits BBCH’
Continued on Back*



Senator Susan Collins looks at a sticker book with 3-year-old patient Amelia Churchill and her mother, Brittany.

'Hunger Prevention' From Front

They also are more likely to struggle in school and exhibit behavioral problems. When children have access

to healthy, nutritious meals, they have a greater chance for social-emotional growth and academic success.

"We began asking these two AAP-endorsed food insecurity questions in our

Westbrook pediatric practice in late January and have already identified a half-dozen families that were in need," said Brian Youth, M.D., pediatrician at MMP - Westbrook Pediatrics. "It

was gratifying to be able to not only identify this issue, but give a family some tools to seek immediate help by providing information on SNAP benefits before they even left the office."

'Sen. Collins visits BBCH' From Front

She said Senator Collins was receiving it because she "demonstrates an understanding of the plight of the healthcare system's most frail and vulnerable populations, including Maine children." Dr. Jewell noted Senator Collins' votes

against proposals last summer that would have made sweeping changes and cuts to Medicaid and undermined the protections included in the Affordable Care Act.

In her remarks, Senator Collins noted MMC's dedication to growing the next generation of pediatric caregivers through its Pediatric

Residency Training Program as she restated her commitment to championing causes that benefit children. "I look forward to continuing my work to help ensure that every child has an equal chance for a healthy life," she said.

While at BBCH, Senator Collins visited with two patients, bringing them books

and chatting with them. 3-year-old Amelia Churchill showed the Senator her sticker book. 12-year-old Andrew Perdue talked to Senator Collins about his favorite books, the Harry Potter series, and even did a little reading himself in a British accent!

Let's Go!'s Response to National Childhood Obesity Data

While new national data show childhood obesity on the rise, Maine's numbers offer a more promising story. Childhood obesity rates are starting to decline for some groups in Maine.

A study published in the March 2018 issue of Pediatrics shows that the obesity rate for children aged 2-19 has increased from 14.6 percent in 1999 to 18.5 percent in 2016. That means that nationwide, almost 1 in 5 children have obesity. As the study's authors point out, ongoing efforts to curb obesity "must continue, as must innovation, research, and most importantly at this juncture, collaboration among clinicians, public

health leaders, hospitals, and all levels of government."

Here in Maine, where Let's Go!, The Barbara Bush Children's Hospital at Maine Medical Center, and other community organizations have led such a comprehensive approach to fighting childhood obesity, there are signs of success. In the decade-plus that Let's Go! has been monitoring childhood obesity rates in Greater Portland, those rates have stabilized. Recent data also show a downward trend specifically among girls aged 3-18, from 13 percent in 2013 to 9.7 percent in 2016.

Data reported from the

Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey told a similar story. A significant decrease was seen in the percent of third graders who have obesity, reported at 12.3 percent in 2017, down from 20.8 percent in 2015. In addition, the data appear to show a slight downward trend in obesity for fifth graders, from 22.6 percent in 2015 to 19.1 percent in 2017 (All rates cited are based on measured heights and weights).

While there is no single or simple solution to reverse the course of obesity's rise, evidence points to changing policies and creating environments that support healthy choices as

instrumental in the stabilization and reduction of obesity prevalence. The study in Pediatrics recommends the same kind of collaborative, coordinated strategy that Let's Go! has employed since 2006, both with its earliest partners and most recently with its state collaborator, the Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention. Let's Go! remains dedicated to increasing opportunities for healthy eating and active living through sustainable environmental and policy change. We are setting a positive example for the nation as a whole that is showing promising results.



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