

NH Commission on Prevention of Childhood Obesity (HB 1422)

Meeting Record – April 6, 2009

Attending: Rep. Joan Schulze; Rep. Nancy Stiles; Sandi Van Scoyoc; Andy Bohannon; Jackie Moulton; Judi, UNH Coop. Extension; Margaret Murphy; Mary McGowan, MD; Judy Fillion; John Wahrenberger, Chuck Capetta, MD; Yvonne Goldsburly

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The April meeting of the Commission was the first of two sessions reserved for public testimony. The Commission heard from nine members of the public during the session on a wide range of topics including afterschool programs, school-based food curricula and food options. A number of suggestions were offered to the Commission, which will be pursued in our continuing work of the Commission.

The **Coordinated Approach to Childhood Health (CATCH)** program featured heavily in the presentations. CATCH aims to equip children with knowledge, skills, self efficacy and intentions to make healthy dietary and physical activity decisions. CATCH employs inclusive, non-competitive games to engage children in physical activity. CATCH is currently used in a number of sites across the state. The establishment and current expansion of CATCH is supported through a grant from the Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation. The Foundation for Healthy Communities is coordinating the training and on-going support in NH. The program seeks to expand the reach of CATCH while ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of the program.

Testimony was presented by Gina Rotundi on behalf of the **NH Boys and Girls (B&G) Club Alliance**. This group of 7 B&G clubs services 19,000 members in 17 communities. In 2007, they identified obesity and fitness as a priority issue in their clubs. In 2008, they proposed an approach for use across the Alliance. This consists of five elements:

1. Culture Change
2. Healthy Eating Knowledge Transfer
3. Daily physical programming (30-60 minutes)
4. Teen-focused programming
5. Family Outreach

Art McClean, Executive Director of the Boys and Girls Club of Derry spoke to the changes in programming at his club to counteract the observed increases in childhood obesity. To this end, wholesale changes were instituted at the Club, including the elimination all sugar/soft drinks in the vending machines and the introduction of the CATCH¹ program. CATCH runs in the fall and spring at three days per week and involves both physical activity and nutrition education. The program also includes outreach to the parents, and efforts to engage health providers. The program consists of a self assessment before and after the program. Initial results show that children are increasing their level of activity, their consumption of healthy food choices. There was some resistance to the food changes, but over time this has abated.

The next presenter was Mike Goodwin on behalf of the B&G Club of Salem. Salem was also experiencing a perceptible rise in childhood obesity and opted to implement the Healthy Habits²

¹ More information is available at <http://www.catchinfo.org/index.asp>

² More information is available at <http://www.bgca.org/programs/healthlife.asp>

program developed by the national B&G Clubs. To date, 60 children have completed the program with, 10 children at a time engaging in the 10 week program. This program is also assessed through a pre and post test and has demonstrated increased knowledge among participants at the conclusion of the program.

The Salem B&G Club has made other changes to nurture a culture of healthy eating. For example, they offer a healthy snack café twice per week, they grow and sell hydroponic vegetables on site, and they try to serve healthier foods at family fun events. The Commission suggested linking up with local hospitals and nutritionists to ensure that the nutritional choices made for the vending machines are the most appropriate. Additionally, this can serve to strengthen relationships with local healthcare providers.

Hal Jordan, President of the Manchester YMCA spoke on behalf of the **Granite State Alliance of YMCAs**. YMCAs are effective as they focus on the family as a whole and are therefore well positioned to assist with the culture change needed throughout the family.

The YMCAs identified the following six core program elements to reverse increasing childhood obesity:

1. Programs must begin in preschool and continue to adulthood
2. Programs with the greatest impact will be offered at every stage of a child's life
3. Programs must offer 30-60 minutes of moderate activity, be age appropriate, and include cardio-vascular exercise, core muscle strength and flexibility
4. Nutrition education must be combined with exercise programs
5. Programs must be accessible to all income levels
6. Programs should involve the family as well as the child

The YMCA has fully embraced the need for complete culture change. The current Healthy Kids Initiative includes:

- Healthy Kids Day – an event for the family including health and nutrition information and age appropriate exercise
- Healthy Childcare – looking at daycare, before and afterschool care and mandating a level of activity for the children participating
- Healthy Summer Camps – focused on ensuring daily physical activity and good nutrition
- Family Fitness – fitness centers that offer opportunities for families to enjoy including age appropriate fitness equipment
- Special programs targeting obese youth – Fit and Healthy Kids Style is a ten week program in Manchester with Dartmouth Hitchcock, Catholic Medical Center, Elliot Hospital and Child Health Services is currently being developed and tested

Furthermore, they have modified their business practices to institutionalize the core values of the YMCA. This includes modifying job descriptions to ensure that physical activity is a core component of all jobs that work with young people, and making all of fundraising activities health oriented for all ages (ie. Hop-a-thon for preschoolers). The YMCA also uses the CATCH curriculum.

Mr. Jordan offered the following policy recommendations for consideration by the Commission:

1. Require daily fitness programs in public schools.
2. Provide incentives from the state when licensing childcare programs for all providers who offer daily physical activity as part of their curriculum.
3. Provide state youth fitness awards for all children who exercise 1 hour per day.

4. Appropriate funds to develop model programs to replicate across the state.

Andy Bohannon spoke on behalf of CATCH and provided a comprehensive description of the program and spoke to its deployment in Keene. In 2004, the **Keene Parks and Recreation Department** implemented CATCH Kids Club (CKC). The program has continued and in 2008 had 40 registered participants. The program combines physical activity, through non-competitive games, and nutrition education and this year has also integrated tennis lessons through a USTA grant.

CATCH is currently being rolled out across the state. A benefit of CATCH is its ease of use. With such high turnover in afterschool programs, CATCH can be used by those with little training, however, training on the program increases the effectiveness of the delivery. Additionally, it takes time to internalize cultural change and over the course of the three years that the program has been in place in Keene, the impact has increased.

Katherine Strong and Martha Judson both spoke on nutrition in school. Judson, a former school nurse and consultant for **UNH Cooperative Extension** spoke about the Food is Elementary curriculum that she implemented at New Franklin school in Portsmouth for 6 years. This curriculum is delivered through two 45 minute session each semester. The cross-disciplinary hands on curriculum combines food preparation and nutrition education alongside a cultural component.

Katherine Strong, representing the **Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM)**, works with schools to improve their nutrition choices and on the federal level to influence USDA school lunch program. PCRM promotes the inclusion of more plant based foods to teach healthy eating habits. They focus on national school lunch program and in addition to their advocacy efforts, they work with schools to help identify plant based foods for possible inclusion. They can assist with recipes as well.

The biggest barrier to inclusion is financial. The current structures bias the purchase of certain foods. PCRM can work alongside school districts to devise innovative purchasing ideas, for example, as a state purchase large quantities of plant based foods, combine districts to bulk purchase. They are keen to find ways to make plant based food choices budget neutral.

Currently, four states recommend that vegetarian and vegan meals be available in schools. Kathryn Strong is open to working with other schools in NH and provided her contact information to the Commission.

The Commission will meet again on May 4, 2007 at 10 AM in Room 205 of the LOB. The Commission expects to hear additional public testimony, particularly in the area of school-based nutrition.