

The Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center

Newsflash

Fall 2016 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

Welcome back to: Kim Doughty, MPH, PhD, who has returned to the PRC as a Research Associate, and in a new role as Coordinator of our VITAHLS initiative and CHOOSE study. Dr. Doughty previously worked part-time at the PRC while completing her MPH degree at Southern Connecticut State University and doctoral degree in Nutrition at the University of Massachusetts, and has been on the faculty of the Public Health Department at Southern CT State University. Her research interests are in obesity prevention during all stages of childhood. In her role as VITAHLS Coordinator, she is working with participating school districts and community partners to implement and evaluate nutrition and physical activity initiatives, with the goal of reducing childhood obesity and chronic disease in Naugatuck Valley communities.

Goodbye and best wishes to: Amy Bethge, MPH, VITAHLS Coordinator, who recently accepted a full-time position with Western Connecticut Health Network. We'd like to express thanks for her contributions to the VITAHLS project, including our Third Annual Healthy Cooking Competition, and our recent survey of school and community partners, and for her coordination of our clinical data collection and children's cooking classes as part of our CHOOSE core research project. We wish her the best in her new position!

Current Projects

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

This initiative, led by the PRC and Griffin Hospital in partnership with 5 school districts, and several community partners, involves developing, implementing, evaluating, and sustaining a comprehensive Valley-wide school-based program 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 by email at kim.doughty@yalegriffinprc.org.

- **VITAHLS Partner Survey:** In the spring of 2016, the PRC administered this online survey to assess the VITAHLS partnership. It was completed by 17 representatives of the VITAHLS school districts and 4 representatives of local organizations. The survey inquired about our partners' satisfaction with the partnership, its progress, and the PRC's role; perceived benefits/drawbacks of participating in this initiative; and suggestions and topics of interest for future meetings. The results have been used to guide the development of the PRC's program planning goals for the 2016-2017 school year.

- **VITAHLS Program Inventory Survey:** The PRC has developed a survey to help understand the type and extent of VITAHLS-related programs and activities offered in each of the VITAHLS districts' schools during the last 2 school years, along with policies/practices in place to promote healthful eating and physical activity. Representatives of our partner school districts provided feedback on the survey design. The districts will complete this survey by December 2016.
- **Working group meetings:** Now that the summer break has ended, our monthly working group meetings with our school and community partners have resumed. As part of this year's meetings, we plan to reconvene our subcommittees, and offer periodic presentations by outside speakers. In October, Christine Wallace, SNS presented on the Smarter Lunchroom concept, which applies the concepts of behavioral economics to child nutrition programs. Her presentation highlighted successful strategies that require little effort or cost to implement, and that can result in increased customer satisfaction and less food waste because they encourage students to make choices in the foods they buy. For more information and resources, please refer to www.smarterlunchrooms.org.

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

The PRC's core research project for this 5-year CDC funding cycle (October 2014 through September 2019) will compare the impact of 4 levels of interventions in 5 communities, with school districts serving as epicenters, and expanding within/beyond schools to other "portals" in their respective communities. The Valley Initiative to Advance Health and Learning in Schools (VITAHLS) is one component of CHOOSE. CHOOSE will use a multilevel approach to improve diet quality and physical activity in children and adults. Potential portals include schools, worksites, clinical settings, faith-based settings, and supermarkets. We will continue to develop/expand the VITAHLS initiative in Ansonia, Derby, Seymour, and Shelton schools, and have added the Naugatuck Public Schools to serve as a control/delayed intervention group. For more information, contact PRC Deputy Director Beth Comerford, email beth.comerford@yalegriffinprc.org.

- **CHOOSE data collection:** For Phase 1 of this study, the PRC has been collecting baseline data from a representative sample of child/adult pairs, i.e., students in grades 4, 6, and 8 in VITAHLS districts, and one parent/guardian of each student. The data include diet quality, body mass index, waist circumference, and blood pressure of children and parents, along with parents' physical activity levels. Last fall and winter, we collected data from child/adult pairs in intervention schools. This summer, after receiving approval from the Naugatuck Public Schools, we collected data from child/adult pairs in that district as well. Despite our recruitment strategies, scheduling several dates/times for data collection, and providing incentives (a healthful meal and \$50 gift card), the data collection status has not met our expectations. We have collected data from 14% (22 of 155) of child/adult pairs representing intervention Level 1 school districts, 65% (101 of 155) of pairs representing Level 2, and 46% (71 of 155) of pairs representing Level 3. Our research team is currently reassessing our data collection strategies and considering alternative plans for this study.
- **Children's Community Cooking Project:** After partnering with the Valley YMCA this spring on 2 cooking classes offered at its after-school program at Mead Elementary School, we partnered again this summer on a pilot/evaluation of cooking classes offered at the YMCA day camp, which enrolls children who are 5 to 12 years of age. The project included 6 weekly classes offered in an age-appropriate manner to 70 children (taught in small groups based on age) during the 10-week camp. Each class focused on preparing a healthful snack, beverage, or component of a meal such as a salad or side dish. The foods were tasty, affordable, and simple to prepare, using only a few ingredients. We combined direct instruction delivered by a qualified lead chef/instructor during week 1, with instruction in subsequent weeks provided by college students trained by the lead instructor to offer the classes and serve as role models to encourage interest in trying new foods. The YMCA staff provided assistance and oversight, and PRC staff and volunteers observed and assisted as needed.

We evaluated the impact of the cooking classes with a pre/post survey administered to the older children (age 8-12 years). Survey results indicated that the classes led to increased preferences for certain foods (particularly black beans and tomatoes) and increased self-efficacy in making healthful snacks and salads, measuring ingredients, trying new foods, and preparing meals at home. We also assessed program feasibility through discussions with instructors and the YMCA day camp coordinator about training, program planning/delivery, YMCA staff roles, and sustainability.

News from the 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. CARE, in partnership with the New Haven community, is working in tandem with the PRC in taking action against chronic diseases and other challenges that threaten the health of community members. Since its founding in 2007 at the Yale School of Public Health, CARE has worked to identify solutions to improve the health of New Haven residents through community-based research/projects focusing on social, environmental, and behavioral risk factors.

- ***New Partnership with Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU)*** - CARE is now partnering with SCSU to enhance its efforts to improve the health of New Haven residents. Over the next 3 years, CARE will transition its home base from Yale University to the SCSU campus, with SCSU assuming responsibility for its community engagement work. The Yale School of Public Health will remain as the central hub of CARE's research activities, with a focus on data analysis from its New Haven Public Schools and neighborhood health surveys. Alycia Santilli, who has been with CARE since 2007, will assume the CARE Director role, while CARE founder Jeannette Ickovics, PhD will serve in an advisory capacity. Sandy Bulmer, PhD, Dean of SCSU's School of Health and Human Services, said that a new SCSU Center for Community Engagement will help foster student service learning and benefit CARE's community partners. The SCSU School of Health and Human Services combines 7 disciplines (communication disorders; exercise science; marriage and family therapy; nursing; public health; social work; and recreation, tourism, and sport management) under one umbrella. This provides opportunities for interdisciplinary studies and a wide range of community-based internships. For more information, see <http://southernct.edu/academics/schools/health/care/index.html>

Presentations

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

- Co-presenter on *The Power of Food: Wisdom from the World's Leading Experts* on July 16th at the IDEA World Nutrition and Behavior Change Summit in Los Angeles, CA.
- Pre-conference workshop on *Lifestyle Interventions and a Personalized Medicine Approach to Healthy Ageing* on August 5th; and presentations on *Knowing What to Eat: Refusing to Swallow It* and *Anti-Aging from Altitude: A Holistic View of the Elephant in the Room* on August 6th at the 10th Annual Australasian Academy of Anti-Ageing Medicine conference in Melbourne, Australia.
- *If Lifestyle is the Medicine, What is the Spoon?* on August 11th at Lifestyle, Environment, and Chronic Disease: A Confluence of Causes, an event held at the University of Sydney in Australia.
- *Knowing What to Eat: Refusing to Swallow It* on September 3rd at the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, South African National Nutrition Conference in Cape Town, South Africa.
- Presentation at Lifestyle Medicine: A UPMC Conversation, held on September 29th/30th at the Beckwith Institute, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, in Pittsburgh, PA.
- *Feet, Forks, and the Fate of Our Families* on October 6th at the Middlesex Hospital Grand Rounds in Middletown, CT.

- Co-presenter on *Finding Common Ground: Communicating the Tenants of Good Nutrition* on October 16th, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo 2016 in Boston, MA.
- *The Rational Un-fattening of America's Families: Can We Get There From Here?* on October 21st at the 2016 Annual Meeting of the Florida Hospital Association in Orlando, FL.
- Keynote: *From Stone Age to Climate Change: The Nature of Our Nurturing, OR The Nurturing of Nature* on October 24th at the American College of Lifestyle Medicine Annual Conference in Naples, FL.

Valentine Njike, MD, PRC Assistant Director of Research & Evaluation, gave the following presentations:

- Biostatistics lectures on July 8th, July 22nd, and August 19th to medical residents in the Internal Medicine and Preventive Medicine programs at Griffin Hospital.
- A presentation on the Zika virus on August 19th at the Valley Chamber of Commerce in Shelton.

Publications

Katz DL. *The Mass of Humanity and the Weight of the World: Obesity and the Environment at a Confluence of Causes.* Curr Obes Rep. 2016 Oct 13. Review. [Epub ahead of print]

Epstein LH, Finkelstein EA, **Katz DL**, Jankowiak N, Pudlewski C, Paluch RA. *Effects of Nutrient Profiling and Price Changes Based on NuVal® Scores on Food Purchasing in an Online Experimental Supermarket.* Public Health Nutr. 2016 Aug;19(12):2157-64.

Njike VY, Kavak Y, **Treu JA**, **Doughty K**, **Katz DL.** *Snacking, Satiety, and Weight: A Randomized, Controlled Trial.* Am J Health Promot. 2016 Aug 10. [Epub ahead of print]

Njike VY, Smith TM, Shuval O, Shuval K, Edshteyn I, Kalantari V, Yaroch AL. *Snack Food, Satiety, and Weight.* Adv Nutr. 2016 Sep;7(5):866-78. Review.

Njike VY, Yarandi N, Petraro P, **Ayettey RG**, **Treu JA**, **Katz DL.** *Inclusion of Walnut in the Diets of Adults at Risk for Type 2 Diabetes and Their Dietary Pattern Changes: A Randomized, Controlled, Cross-over Trial.* BMJ Open Diabetes Research and Care 2016;4:e000293.

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, December 13th 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, 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) or any of the staff listed in this ***Newsflash***.

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The Yale-Griffin PRC is a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program.



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