

The Yale-Griffin Prevention Research Center

Newsflash

Spring 2018 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

Community Committee Meeting: We plan to hold our annual meeting on Thursday, May 3rd from 1:00-3:00 p.m., preceded by lunch at 12:30. We will confirm the location when we get closer to that date.

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).

- **Valley Health Challenge Campaign:**

The PRC and school partners have begun a multi-district nutrition and healthy eating campaign targeting students and families. It will include themes on physical activity (Move Your Body) and nutrition (Create a Healthy Plate), with weekly challenges related to each theme. We will promote the campaign via social media and other means selected by each district.

NOW RECRUITING! A Randomized, Placebo-Controlled Study of Mindfulness Meditation in Treating Insomnia in Multiple Sclerosis

- **Study details:** The State of CT Biomedical Research Trust Fund has provided funding to Griffin Hospital for MS research conducted by the PRC and Joseph Guarnaccia, MD, Director of the MS Treatment Center at Griffin Hospital. This study will examine whether mindfulness meditation is more effective than sleep hygiene counseling in treating insomnia and improving quality of life in people with MS. Although prior research has shown some benefits of mindfulness in treating insomnia in general, no studies thus far have examined the efficacy of mindfulness in treating MS-related insomnia.
- **Who we're recruiting:** Adults age 18 years or older diagnosed with MS, with a history of chronic insomnia, but not obstructive sleep apnea or narcolepsy. They must be willing to: (1) attend a clinical screening; (2) attend counseling/educational sessions; and (3) take part in clinical exams and surveys.

- ***What will happen:*** Each of the 90 adults who enrolls will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group will attend 10 sessions of mindfulness training. The other group will receive tips to make sleep more efficient. All participants will wear Fitbits for several weeks to record their sleep data. At 3 time points, they will complete questionnaires and visit Griffin Hospital for clinical assessments.
- ***Compensation:*** Participants will be compensated a total of \$200 over the duration of this study. All study visits and interventions, including mindfulness sessions, will be free of charge.
- ***How to apply:*** If you or someone you know is interested in participating, contact Sue Acheychek by email at susan.acheychek@yalegriffinprc.org, or by phone at 203-732-1265 ext. 220, or Ms. Rockiy Ayettey by email at rockiy.ayetey@yalegriffinprc.org or by phone at 203-732-1265 ext. 300.

Project Findings

VITAHLS: School Breakfast Focus Groups

- ***Purpose:*** Evidence suggests that eating breakfast regularly may improve academic performance and school attendance among children. Serving breakfast in the classroom is associated with improved diet quality. Despite these benefits, less than half of Connecticut students who qualify for free or reduced-price school meals, and who participate in school lunch, also take part in the school breakfast program. We conducted this study to identify the drivers of, and barriers to, school breakfast participation among students in two school districts that are part of the VITAHLS initiative.
- ***Methods:*** In 2017, the PRC conducted 13 focus groups with elementary, middle, and high school students. Of these, 12 were in a district in which 22% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals; one was in a middle school in a district that offered universal free breakfast because 69% of students qualified for these meals. Each focus group included 5-11 students with parental consent.
- ***Data Analysis:*** We used a software program to identify emerging themes from the transcripts and group them into categories based on how they related to our research questions.
- ***Results:*** Below is a brief summary of our findings relative to our research questions.

Why do students choose to eat breakfast? The major factors in deciding whether to eat it on school days were parental influence, hunger or desire to avoid physical symptoms, and inadequate time. Many elementary school students said their parents stressed the importance of breakfast, and took steps to ensure that they ate it each morning. Children in grades K-6 tended to report feeling hungry in the morning, while those in grades 7-12 more often mentioned a lack of hunger. Some students said they found it hard to pay attention if they skipped breakfast. However, many students skipped breakfast due to a lack of hunger or desire to eat early in the morning. For some, the importance of eating breakfast varied based on their plans for the day. Many middle and high school students who skipped breakfast said they felt rushed in the morning and had too little time to eat it during the school week. Some said they only ate breakfast on the weekends when they had more time.

Why do students eat breakfast at home? Most felt it was a more appealing option than eating it at school. The top reason was distaste for school food. Many said that school foods are unhealthy or “junk” or “fake.” School breakfast was commonly perceived as a waste of money because better, less expensive food was available at home. Lack of time was also a perceived barrier. Students reported feeling too rushed at school and having other priorities - including socializing with friends.

Why do students eat breakfast at school? While some mentioned eating breakfast at school when preferred foods - such as breakfast sandwiches or “brownie bars” - were served, most students said they ate breakfast at school if hungry and lacking other options due to time constraints at home.

How could school breakfasts be improved? Students expressed a desire for: (1) more food choices, particularly a larger variety of fruits; (2) more opportunities to customize their meals; (3) fresh made-to-order “real” foods, rather than “fake” processed foods; and (4) more healthful options.

- **Next steps:**

The PRC will share the results with all five VITAHLS school districts to use as they see fit. We also are preparing a manuscript for publication, to benefit school food service directors in other districts.

- **For more information:**

Contact VITAHLS Coordinator Kim Doughty, email kim.doughty@yalegriffinprc.org.

Grant Proposals and Awards

RECENTLY-SUBMITTED PROPOSALS

- **Neighborhood Cooking Education Project**

The PRC has submitted a proposal to the Allen Foundation to improve diet quality among low-income families in Ansonia by providing skills-oriented education and opportunities to try healthful, plant-based recipes. The objectives are to: (1) deliver healthy cooking workshops; (2) increase at-home meal preparation and confidence in cooking healthful meals; (3) increase intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains; and (4) reduce intake of added sugar. The Valley United Way launched a “Grow Your Own” community garden program in 2017 to help increase access to fruits and vegetables among Ansonia residents, with about 300 people taking part. We propose to build on the momentum of “Grow Your Own” by inviting 40 low-income families from this program to take part in a family-focused healthy cooking program and receive financial incentives to buy fruits and vegetables.

- **Effects of Prenatal Probiotic Supplementation on Pregnancy and Birth Outcomes in Overweight and Obese Women**

We have sent a letter of intent to Cultech for a proposed study to determine the effects of probiotic supplementation during pregnancy in overweight and obese women. Obesity and diabetes in pregnancy are associated with adverse health outcomes for mothers and infants. Probiotic supplementation has shown promise in improving outcomes in pregnant women and their infants, including reduced insulin resistance and gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM), and improved maternal inflammatory biomarkers. We propose a randomized controlled trial to compare effects of daily supplementation of probiotics vs. placebo in women from early pregnancy through infant birth on maternal insulin resistance, GDM risk and other health outcomes. We will also examine infant weight and length; maternal postpartum weight loss; and maternal postpartum depression and anxiety. Principal Investigators on this project, if funded, will be Kim Doughty, PhD, MPH of the PRC and Michael Kessler, MD of Griffin Faculty Physicians.

Presentations

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

- *Lifestyle is the Medicine, What's the Spoon?* Keynote presentation on February 9th for Pri-Med Educational Programmes Ltd. In Fort Lauderdale, FL.
- *Edible Education 101: the Truth about Food.* Guest lecture on February 21st at the University of California Berkley campus in Berkeley, CA.
- *Reversing Chronic Diseases Through Plant Based Diets: Past, Present and Future.* Plenary lecture on February 26th at the 7th International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition at Loma Linda University in Loma Linda, CA.

Valentine Njike, MD, PRC Assistant Director of Research & Evaluation, presented a lecture on conducting and implementing multi-side translation research on February 26th to 25 undergraduate students at Yale University as part of a course on biotechnology and the developing world.

Publications

- Berman MA, Guthrie NL, Edwards KL, Appelbaum KJ, **Njike VY**, Eisenberg DM, **Katz DL**. *Change in Glycemic Control With Use of a Digital Therapeutic in Adults With Type 2 Diabetes: Cohort Study*. JMIR Diabetes. 2018.3(1) e3.
- Yeh M-C, Glick-Bauer M, **Katz DL**. *Weight Maintenance and Weight Loss: The Adoption of Diets Based on Predominantly Plants*. Chapter 18 of *Vegetarian and Plant-Based Diets in Health and Disease Prevention*, edited by François Mariotti. Academic Press, 2017, ISBN 9780128039687.

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. 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 10th from 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.**
Berman M, Bozsik F, Shook RP, et al. *Evaluation of the Healthy Lifestyles Initiative for Improving Community Capacity for Childhood Obesity Prevention*. Prev Chronic Dis. 2018 Feb 22;15:E24.

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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Healthier Communities Together

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