

## Educating parents to prevent childhood obesity

**D**uring 2004–2005 the Council on Health Promotion became a principle voice among the chorus of health associations and children's organizations speaking out on childhood obesity. As 2005 draws to a close, the Council is making plans to tackle another public health issue in 2006, but its work on childhood obesity prevention and education has gained a life of its own and will continue next year.

In 2004 the decision to focus on childhood obesity was simple. Stories, reports, and statistics about the increasing prevalence of childhood obesity and the health implications associated with this epidemic were hitting the news on an almost daily basis. The COHP members recognized this issue and decided to advocate for healthy, active lifestyles to help reverse this worrisome trend.

A project working group was quickly struck to bring the project to life. This group, headed by Dr Wilma Arruda, included a pediatrician, a general practitioner (COHP Chair Dr Bill Mackie), a nutritionist, a school health programs specialist, a physical activity specialist, a health promotions specialist, and a BCMA staff person. The working group chose parents as the primary audience for this project that came to be known as the "Eat well, Play well, Stay well," campaign.

Parent role modeling of eating and physical activity habits plays an enormous role in determining whether a child becomes overweight or obese. Therefore, educating parents about healthy lifestyle choices as a means of preventing childhood obesity became the focus of this campaign.

Throughout 2005, the committee used a series of news releases and web-based articles to promote awareness

around nine key messages associated with healthy eating habits, increasing physical activity, and protecting children from chronic diseases:

- Eat together, eat at home
- Eat healthy meals and snacks
- Model healthy eating choices
- Increase activity, decrease inactivity
- Get active with your kids
- Participate in community activities
- Prevent chronic illness
- Avoid diet trends for children
- Know when to consult your doctor about your child's weight

Our news stories garnered local and national media interest, receiving coverage in community newspapers and radio stations throughout BC as well as national attention on CTV Newsnet and community newspapers in other provinces. The Council also had two articles published in *Westcoast Families* magazine to further communicate the importance of healthy living choices to parents in BC. The Council partnered with Dairyland to place a side panel message on healthy active living on 1 litre milk cartons throughout BC during September 2005.

Last spring BCMA President Dr Jack Burak issued a letter to members requesting physician volunteers to deliver the "Eat well, Play well, Stay well" presentation to parents in their local community. The Council was delighted by members' interest in and support of this program. Physician presentations are now taking place at school parent group meetings in communities around the province thanks to the generosity of physicians, residents, and medical school students who have volunteered.

The BCMA has partnered with the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils and Action Schools! BC to help promote the "Eat well, Play well,

Stay well" physician presentation program. The BCMA was commended for this program earlier this year at the BC Forum on Childhood Obesity. Furthermore, the New Brunswick Medical Society and the CMA Council on Health Care and Promotion are reviewing the program in order to adapt it for use in other jurisdictions.

We are very pleased that this program will continue into next year, thanks to the support of many BCMA members who have expressed an interest in being involved. The Council is still recruiting physician presenters for the program. If you would like to be a physician presenter or would like more information about this program please contact the BCMA Communications Department at 604 638-2881 or [lmunro@bcma.bc.ca](mailto:lmunro@bcma.bc.ca).

The Council on Health Promotion would like to thank Ms Sharon Storchuk, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC and Yukon; Ms Lisa Forster-Coull, the Ministry of Health Services; Mr Dwayne McCowan, the Ministry of Education; and Ms Sharon Meredith, BC Recreation and Parks Association for their assistance in providing direction to the project. A special thanks also goes to Dr Wilma Arruda for her work as chair of the project working group. Dr Arruda's interest, experience, and expertise in childhood obesity education and treatment played a key role in developing this project.

Watch for more information to come soon on the Council on Health Promotion's 2006 major project.

—Linda Munro  
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Manager**