

Cape Fear Healthy Carolinians Obesity Prevention Program

Background and Objectives

For the past 15 years there has been an annual increase in the average Body Mass Index of the citizens of North Carolina. Forty-five percent of North Carolina children are overweight or at risk for overweight. These numbers can be attributed to a multitude of causes including lack of access to nutritious foods, sedentary lifestyle factors, and other environmental causes. All of these factors influence individual choices for diet and exercise.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is one of the top causes of preventable diseases, second only to tobacco. New Hanover and Brunswick Counties mirror North Carolina in staggering obesity statistics and related chronic diseases including diabetes, heart disease and other life threatening illnesses.

In early 2005, Wilmington Health Access for Teens' (W.H.A.T.'s) Executive Director convened a group of health care organization representatives at the request of the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust Health Care Division Director and the Cape Fear Memorial Foundation Executive Director. The purpose was to develop a community collaboration to address the serious issue of obesity in New Hanover County. To further this effort to consolidate community planning, W.H.A.T. organized an Obesity Summit Group at the request of Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust. Around the same time, the UNCW Division for Public Service and Continuing Studies' Vice Chancellor organized a group composed primarily of faculty and staff of UNCW as an Obesity Prevention Committee to identify ways that the University could address the obesity problem. Those two groups plus others have consolidated efforts and reorganized as a committee of Cape Fear Healthy Carolinians to establish an effective and efficient inclusive structure to assess community issues and solutions, plan, acquire resources for, and implement obesity prevention strategies.

Cape Fear Healthy Carolinians' Obesity Prevention Initiative is developing and implementing a variety of strategies to decrease overweight and obesity in both adults and children. Our programs and initiatives are aimed at children in schools and after school settings, adults in the workplace and families in neighborhoods, churches and other public places.

Through a fast-moving committee process, the following objectives were identified for the Obesity Prevention Committee:

- To reduce the percentage of children (ages 2-18) and adolescents who are overweight or obese by 10% by the year 2010.
- Plan and implement a comprehensive marketing promotional campaign to change the behavior of adults, families and children in the Cape Fear Region regarding the issue of obesity.

Several strategies are in place to achieve these goals:

- Hire a Program Coordinator and a Health Educator to help implement committee objectives.
- Reduce the percentage of adults (ages 19-64) who are overweight or obese by 10% by the year 2010.

- Plan and implement a community initiative, neighborhood by neighborhood, corporation by corporation and school by school to offer a "wellness template" for each group. The template will offer a menu of best practices in wellness programs and activities for each audience depending on their needs and interests, such as walking programs and incentives (scales or pedometers, for example), weight loss programs and incentives, lunch n' learns, nutrition advice, etc.
- Acquire volunteer and financial resources and support to gradually support a comprehensive community health initiative.

Programs and Initiatives

In the spring of 2006, the Obesity Prevention Committee received approximately \$511,000 from Kate B. Reynolds Foundation and Cape Fear Memorial Foundation to fund obesity prevention initiatives. This money allowed the Committee to hire a full-time Coordinator, Health Educator and a part-time Office Assistant to help coordinate and promote obesity prevention programs and initiatives within the community. UNCW is taking the lead to administer grant funding and oversee evaluation of the obesity prevention initiative.

In addition, Kate B. Reynolds funded 6 partner initiatives:

- The Wilmington Family YMCA received funding to provide a Nutrition, Exercise, and Wellness program for several Wilmington Housing Authority youth and their families.
- Wilmington Health Access for Teens received funding to provide peer health education and support for overweight adolescents that want to lose weight.
- Wilmington Housing Authority will use funding to plant and maintain a community garden at a public housing development.
- Partnership for Children received funding for a Lay Health Advisor to provide nutrition and physical activity information to Latino women and their children.
- Child Advocacy Commission will provide an interactive nutrition curriculum "Miss Magic Apron" to child daycare providers in the community.
- New Hanover County Schools will purchase Recess Packs for 11 elementary schools to help students increase physical activity during recess.

In addition to these funded initiatives, the Obesity Prevention Committee is working on other important projects designed to improve health outcomes including Wilmington Walks and Winner's Circle.

Winner's Circle is a menu-labeling system that helps consumers identify healthy food choices when they dine away from home. This program has been implemented in all 39 New Hanover County Schools. In addition, this program will be implemented on UNCW's campus and some area restaurants starting in 2007.

Wilmington Walks is a community-based effort to fight obesity in the Cape Fear region through education and programming. Wilmington Walks provides brochures, maps, signs, and trail markers to help establish safe walking paths in neighborhoods throughout the community. The first trail was established in the Forest Hills neighborhood in May 2006. The Downtown Loop was established in November 2006 for people who work, live and get exercise downtown.