

Bryan Howington
Summer Enrichment 2009

“Robeson County’s highly diverse population earns it the distinction of being the most ethnically diverse rural county in the U.S. Based on the 2000 Census, its multiracial population of 123,339 is 38% Native American, 32% European American, 25% African American, and 5% Latino/Hispanic. Robeson County is home to the Lumbee, the largest Native American tribe east of the Mississippi River.” (ncsociology.org)

Many health disparities are extremely prevalent among minority populations and the people of southeastern North Carolina are no exception. In particular, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity among children have become an epidemic in this country. Several factors have attributed to this epidemic among our youth population. For example, certain populations are predisposed to particular health issues and many times these issues are not monitored until their later stages. Technology such as television and video games has replaced “good ole-fashioned” baseball and basketball that children once used to entertain themselves in years past. Further, our society has become a “drive-thru society” demanding everything here and now. A majority of families simply go to McDonald’s on a regular basis instead of cooking at home. Thirty years ago this was unheard of because families couldn’t afford it. Top on the fact, steroids and chemicals are used in the food that we consume day in and day out. Poultry that once took an extended period of time to mature do so “over-night” in the express lane, thanks to steroids. One individual who wishes to remain anonymous said, “if that mess makes them chickens do that, it’s goin’ in us too.” It is true that children are maturing earlier and data supports the age at which puberty starts is becoming younger. These are only a few factors that I have heard so many people discuss and what the media constantly portrays.

The funding for the Pembroke Housing Authority-Brody School of Medicine Summer Program was provided by the Brody Foundation. The summer program was an opportunity to make an impact on the children of Pembroke North Carolina. The program had three main components which included nutrition information, health disparities education and a daily exercise routine. The nutrition aspect consisted of information about the five different food groups and what was found in them. For example, if fruit was the topic of the day, several fruits would be discussed along with the vitamins and minerals that could be found in them. After exercising the children would be provided a snack, fruit if that was the topic covered along with gatorade or water. The children were taught how to make good lifestyle choices and not simply diet. Instead of drinking regular soda, they could drink diet or if they like to drink three cups of sweet tea, try to consume only one. We realized that children often do not have a choice in what they eat but if they do we tried to teach them wise choices.

Further, the health disparities covered included diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. Small group activities were used to explain the nutrition and health disparities. A majority of the children were aware of diabetes or “sugar” because it was prevalent in their families. We

Bryan Howington
Summer Enrichment 2009

taught them about Type 1 and 2 diabetes and how to decrease the chances of developing diabetes. They were educated about how someone with diabetes has to control their blood sugar. Shaun Deese a second year medical student demonstrated how to give oneself an insulin shot to help control blood sugar. Hypertension or high blood pressure was checked by medical students Tala Smith and Shaun Deese among the kids participating in the camp. After checking their blood pressures which were normal, we taught the children how to help control their blood pressures. Several factors such as salt intake and exercise were discussed which have a huge impact on ones blood pressure. Lastly obesity, was covered and some of the complications. Being obese can accelerate the process of developing diabetes and high blood pressure. All of these issues are intertwined and connected, they can't be separated.

Finally, a fun exercise was incorporated everyday to get the kids active. Exercise reduces the chance of developing hypertension, diabetes, and becoming obese. The kid's personal favorites as well as mine were kickball and football. They also played volleyball, softball, basketball, and used stationary bikes. To begin, the children would run 2-3 laps to warm up, and then stretch to prevent injuries and finally participate in the game for at least thirty minutes. After exercising the children would return inside to rehydrate with water or gatorade and indulge in the snack that was covered earlier that day.

In conclusion, the PHA-BSOM summer program was a huge success. Three medical students, a nursing student, and the staff of PHA were vital assets to the summer program. Everyone worked well together and it was a priceless program. At the conclusion of the three week program an awards ceremony was in order for the kids. The children were able to indulge in "unhealthy" foods for a day like hamburgers and hot dogs. Each child was provide and awards certificate, t-shirt and trophy. The keynote speaker was Kenwin Cummings, a graduate of Purnell Swett High School and local Lumbee athlete who currently plays football with the NFL franchise, NY Jets. Kenwin talked about how he developed Type 1 diabetes and how he was cut from the Pembroke Middle football team in 7th grade. He discussed how he managed his diabetes which he developed in high school and how he was able to accomplish his goal. He said it wasn't easy and thanked Christ for all His help along the way.

I only hope the kids enjoyed the program as much as the adults and were inspired like we were.