

A COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY SERVICE & INVOLVEMENT: FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF MEDICINE FAMILY MEDICINE INTEREST GROUP



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At Florida State University College of Medicine in November 2017 I had the privilege of filling one of two Community Educator positions in the Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG) lead by Dr. Christie Alexander and Student President Elizabeth Dennison. The other position was filled by my colleague Alaina Keith. These positions are designed to focus on the Tar Wars and Ready, Set, Fit Initiatives put forth by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) in 1988 and adopted by FMIG during the 2015-2016 school year. During each visit to Gilchrist Elementary School in Tallahassee, the community educators or their trained volunteers conduct four sessions of either of these initiatives for elementary school-aged children. AAFP designed the presentations, the materials for which are available on their website, but each pair of student presenters has the freedom to conduct the program in their own unique way, and often caters the information to the grade level of the audience. Our involvement with Gilchrist Elementary in presenting these two AAFP initiatives to local students has been a point of pride for our organization for several years, and with each year the Community Educators are eager assume this role as partner to Mary Chapman, our Gilchrist liaison and the Physical Education coach whose students adore her.

The goal of the Tar Wars presentation is to teach elementary-aged children about the health outcomes of tobacco use as well as additional considerations, including cost and marketing strategies targeted toward children and teens that may increase the appeal of tobacco products. We ask the students what else they could buy with the money that is often spent by consumers on cigarettes each week, month, year, etc. and have them volunteer to share how they think smoking affects the human body. Each session is very interactive, with a number of activities to enforce the main learning objectives. One of these is a “straw race” in which students use straws of different circumferences to drink a small amount of water. The student with the widest straw finishes first, and following this is an explanation of the buildup in the lungs and arteries after smoking, and how this hinders blood flow and breathing. The students love hearing the big medical words for what we are presenting to them, and we always enjoy the whole class repeating “atherosclerosis” to us! The favorite activity is our demonstration of lung capacity, which involves a giant tub of water, a two-liter bottle, a straw, and usually makes a great big mess (to the delight of the students, of course). We discuss with the students about how smoking can keep them from participating in all these activities they love doing, and being strong and active is so much harder if their lungs have to try to fight off the poisons from cigarettes. We think that this is a relatable approach to educating these students about a consequence of smoking that may be meaningful to their future even at such a young age.

The Ready, Set, Fit initiative is intended to highlight the importance of being active, eating smart, and feeling good. We have some trivia questions in this presentation focused on food groups, daily exercise, and stress management. We play “Fitness Bingo” in which each square is a specific exercise, such as a jumping jack or sit up. We include sillier squares such as “free dance move” and more wellness-focused squares such as “take a deep breath”. In addition, we have the students share their favorite healthy foods and why they think it is important to fuel their bodies with these foods. There is an abundance of information targeted toward children regarding healthy eating and proper exercise; however, we try to focus a portion of the presentation on mental health as it pertains to the age group of our audience. We explain that it is normal for them to feel negative emotions, such as sadness or anger, but that we want them to think of somebody they can talk to with whom they feel safe as well as something they can do to help manage their stress or emotions in a healthy way.

At the beginning of each session, Mary Chapman invites the students to pay close attention to the presentations so that they can gather ideas for the Art Contest that FMIG

sponsors each April. The students choose which presentation they would like to focus on, and they come up with a slogan or catch phrase to represent an important take away from either Tar Wars or Ready, Set, Fit. With this in mind, they create a piece of art incorporating their chosen phrase. They have creative freedom with their piece, as long as they use an original idea. Ms. Chapman collects the art and sends several thick stacks home with the Community Educators. Out of dozens of submissions, we select our top ten favorites from each of the two initiatives and create an online survey with photos of these submissions. We then submit the survey to the student body and faculty at the College of Medicine to vote on their favorite catchy slogans. Three winners from each initiative are determined, and we invite the students and their families for a pizza party at the College of Medicine. The executive board of FMIG, our student advisor Dr. Christie Alexander, and even the Dean of the College of Medicine, Dr. John Fogarty are present to congratulate the winners. We share a bit about FMIG, Tar Wars, and Ready, Set, Fit with the parents and have the students share with us what inspired their piece of art, and why the message they are sharing with us is important to them.

The Community Educators and our trained volunteers look forward to each of our visits to Gilchrist. Despite our intense academic commitments, spending a morning with these students who are so eager to hear from us and participate in our presentation and activities has been such a positive part of our medical education. They impress us with their knowledge of science and medicine and are so unafraid in their curiosity and we are so honored to be a part of their education. Involvement in our community is an integral part of every activity that our FMIG undertakes. Our FMIG received an AAFP Program of Excellence Award in Community Service at the National Conference in August of 2018. It was truly an honor to receive that award, and it cemented for us the importance of the work we are striving to do in the Tallahassee area. It makes me hopeful to hear the students build on each other's ideas and encourage one another so fiercely in the pursuit of healthy lifestyles. In keeping with the focus of Florida State University College of Medicine on community needs, we seek to empower young children to make educated choices in their lives both now and in their undoubtedly bright futures. ■

About the Author

Kate is a second year medical student at FSU COM who has previously studied public health and Spanish. After completing her second year in Tallahassee in May 2019, she will move to Pensacola, Florida, for her third and fourth year clinical rotations with FSU.

Summary of article: This piece addresses the Family Medicine Interest Group (FMIG) at Florida State University College of Medicine's involvement in the American Academy of Family Physicians initiatives "Tar Wars" and "Ready, Set, Fit!". For the past several years, FMIG's Community Educators have conducted these presentations and their associated activities at Gilchrist Elementary School in Tallahassee, Florida, with the help of Physical Education instructor Mary Chapman. The interactive nature of the programs and the students' eagerness to learn have made FMIG's adoption of these programs a great success.

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