Roberta Goldman, PhD, on Reducing Obesity Risk Factors in Hispanic Children

Pawtucket – Childhood obesity is more prevalent among Hispanic children than children of other ethnic groups, a problem that has been steadily increasing in the United States over the past decade. An anthropologist and researcher with the Center for Primary Care and Prevention at Memorial Hospital is part of a team that conducted focus groups to best determine a plan for reducing risk factors for obesity in Hispanic children.

The study – entitled “Reducing Hispanic Children’s Obesity Risk Factors in the first 1,000 Days of Life: A Qualitative Analysis” – was published in a recent issue of the Journal of Obesity.

ROBERTA GOLDMAN, PHD, of Memorial, was one of its authors.

“According to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), one in three Hispanic children is overweight or obese,” Dr. Goldman notes. “The obesity epidemic in Hispanic communities has become a crisis, and Hispanic children are becoming obese earlier in their lives than ever before.”

The researchers’ goal was to examine underlying reasons for early life obesity risk factors and identify potential early intervention strategies. Through seven focus groups gathering almost 50 pregnant or new mothers, the following reasons for early life obesity were identified:

• Some mothers’ attempts to cope with the physical changes of pregnancy trumped healthy eating and physical activity, even among women who believe good nutrition and exercise are important.
• Women believed excessive gestational weight gain negatively impacted their baby’s health, but they did not think it would lead to childhood obesity.
• Women understood that chubby babies are not necessarily healthy, but did not connect that to later life obesity.
• Mothers felt responsible for ensuring that their babies felt full. Fear of infant hunger can drive bottle use and the early introduction of solid foods.
• Mothers felt compelled to offer early solids and sugary drinks based on their belief that their babies did not like anything else.
• Mothers did not see the harm in television viewing, and some actually felt that screen time promotes infant learning and visual development.

In terms of possible interventions, Goldman says the study participants identified physicians and nutritionists as key resources, and many expressed interest in mobile technology and group or home visits.

“What we found is that there are opportunities to improve Hispanic mothers’ understanding of the role of early weight gain in childhood obesity and other obesity risk factors. This can be done in the first 1,000 days of a baby’s life,” the researchers explain in summation. “Interventions that link health care and public health systems, and include extended family, may help reduce obesity among Hispanic children.”

First Cardiovascular Genetics Clinic opens at the Cardiovascular Institute

Providence – The new Cardiovascular Genetics Clinic at Rhode Island Hospital is the first in the state to offer evaluation and genetic counseling for cardiac conditions.

“If we can identify an inherited cardiac disease in advance, keep it under surveillance, and intervene appropriately, a patient’s life can be dramatically improved and prolonged,” said JOSEPH B. WEISS, MD, PHD, the director of the new clinic and a cardiologist with the Cardiovascular Institute of Rhode Island, The Miriam and Newport hospitals.

After the evaluation and genetic testing, the clinic offers counseling, referrals and follow-up for all confirmed cases.

Research Team Wins Best Poster at American Society for Reproductive Immunology Annual Meeting

Providence – SHIBIN CHENG, MD, PHD, research scientist at Women & Infants Hospital of Rhode Island and assistant professor of pediatrics at The Warren Alpert Medical School of Brown University; JAMES F. PADBURY, MD, pediatrician-in-chief and chief of Neonatal/Perinatal Medicine at Women & Infants Hospital and the William and Mary Oh-William and Elsa Zopf Professor of Pediatrics for Perinatal Research at the Alpert Medical School; AKITOSHI NAKASHIMA, MD, PHD, a visiting scientist from the University of Toyama, Japan; and SURENDRRA SHARMA, MD, PHD, a research scientist and professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Women & Infants Hospital the Alpert Medical School, won the Best Poster Award for their poster, “Understanding and predicting preeclampsia, an enigmatic pregnancy complication, using Alzheimer’s tools,” at the 35th Annual Meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Immunology at Queen’s University, Kingston, ON Canada.

The research examined the similarities in the development of preeclampsia, or pregnancy-induced hypertension, and Alzheimer’s disease. The link that is thought to be common between both diseases is protein misfolding and aggregation. When these proteins aggregate and jumble, they form ball-like structures that deposit in the brain in the Alzheimer’s process and in the placenta causing poor placental transfusion in preeclampsia.

“Making a link between the two diseases provides for an opportunity to understand how they develop and how best to treat them going forward,” explained Dr. Sharma.