

## FamilyCare Partnership Aims to Improve Nutrition for Children and Pregnant Women

**Dan Roth, MD**  
**Vice President of Integrates Services**  
**Mary Cluskey, Ph.D.**  
**Director, OSU College of Public Health and Human Sciences**

(PORTLAND, Ore.) – FamilyCare, Inc., in partnership with Oregon State University, the Children’s Health Alliance (CHA), and Women’s Healthcare Associates (WHA), piloted a new program aimed at improving nutrition for children and pregnant women.

This past summer, interns from Oregon State University’s College of Public Health and Human Sciences accredited nutrition and dietetics internship program (called OSUDI) worked one-on-one with pregnant women who are FamilyCare members and patients of WHA, as well as children who are members and pediatric patients of CHA clinics. WHA is an integrated team of women’s healthcare professionals with eleven Portland-area OB/GYN clinics, while CHA is an association of private practice pediatricians in the Portland-Vancouver area. Both physician groups contract with FamilyCare.

After a collaborative workgroup of FamilyCare, WHA and CHA identified improved patient nutrition as a key priority, Daniel Roth, M.D., FamilyCare’s vice president of Integrated Services, reached out to OSU’s Nutrition unit in the School of Biological and Population Health Sciences, the largest accredited nutrition and dietetics program in the state of Oregon. “We felt we could make a significant difference by focusing on the health of children and pregnant women who are Medicaid members,” says Roth.

Students participating in the post-baccalaureate internships will have previously earned their Bachelor of Science degrees. Their internship with FamilyCare provided an opportunity to gain required clinical experience. OSU’s dietetics program provides the coursework and training to enter supervised internships and pass the Registered Dietitian examination.

“Typically, dietetic students primarily intern at nursing



homes, dialysis centers and hospitals geared toward nutrition care of elderly populations,” explains Roth. “This project offers an opportunity for students to help improve health outcomes for younger patients, setting women and kids on a healthy path for the long term.”

Hillary Lawson, an OSU dietician intern is currently working with WHA this fall and has already put in four weeks toward her six-week rotation at clinics in Tualatin and Newberg. When Lawson started, she had an understanding of the role she was going to play in pregnant women’s lives, but was uncertain where it would lead. What she could be sure of, however, was her ability to lead her patients on a path of healthy eating habits. “By connecting with women in the primary care setting, we could be the first line of prevention, not defense,” says Lawson. “We can help pregnant women establish healthier eating habits, and they in turn can pass along those behaviors to their infants and young children.”

With rates of childhood obesity at epidemic levels in the U.S., project leaders say it has never been more crucial to introduce good nutrition to pregnant women. “One of our biggest challenges is childhood obesity and all of the complications that come with it,” says FamilyCare’s medical director and pediatrician Dr. Resa Bradeen.

On-site dietitians are not common in pediatric and OB/GYN offices, says Bradeen. “The internship program is a proactive solution to the obesity epidemic. “When good nutrition is established early, future health problems can be avoided.”

Mary Cluskey, Ph.D., director of OSUDI, indicates that research evidence demonstrates that eating behaviors are established early, both by maternal prenatal diet and with feeding behaviors of infants and young children. “Interventions that launched this summer with two interns and now, there are six students rotating through CHA and WHA clinics in the Portland-metro area.

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### About FamilyCare

FamilyCare, Inc. is a Medicare and Medicaid managed care organization providing patient-centered healthcare to Oregonians. FamilyCare was the first health plan in Oregon to integrate models of physical and mental health and was the first Coordinated Care Organization in the tri-county area certified by the Oregon Health Authority. FamilyCare serves approximately 50,000 members and has been delivering quality health care for almost 30 years. Under the direction of President and CEO Jeff Heatherington, FamilyCare’s mission is “Creating healthy individuals through innovative systems.”

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