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Pediatricians have new weapon in battle against bulge

By Marisa Yamane

Hawaii's kids are among the nation's heaviest.

And the battle of the bulge is not just a problems for parents.

Local pediatricians hope to conquer the epidemic.

In the high tech medical world, filled with all the latest computers and electronic equipment, this binder may seem a bit low tech.

But this binder, or tool kit as they call it, is the new weapon in the battle against childhood obesity.

The tool kit was introduced to nearly a hundred pediatricians and other health care professionals during a recent seminar at the Hilton Hawaiian Village, put on by the Hawaii chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

"Our chapter has designated childhood obesity as the illness that needs our long term focus strategy," said pediatrician Dr. Galen Chock.

Chock helped create the tool kit, which is filled with forms for physicians and parents, information on portion sizes, and tips for behavioral and lifestyle changes.

"As we finish our exams with our patients we'll be giving them a contract or a commitment form where they'll be committing to certain behavior strategies and be working with them to pick certain goals, what they would work for," said Chock.

According to the Centers for Disease Control's 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 14%of Hawaii's high school students were overweight, and another 14% were at risk for becoming overweight.

"In Hawaii there's a lot which is very surprising, given our environment where you should be able to exercise quite a bit but our social environment says we should eat a lot also," said Chock.

And the problem actually starts at a really young age.

According to a Hawaii Health Department survey, about a fourth of nearly 10,000 keiki entering kindergarten in 2002 were overweight.

"There is no clear cut protocol that you can look at to say you're overweight, just follow this one two three steps and you'll be fine. It doesn't exist. And this tool kit is the first step to try to put those guidelines together for the physicians in one place," said Chock.

Local doctors are also looking into possibly one day doing bariatric surgery on teenagers to treat morbid obesity, as the last resort if all else fails.

"I think right now it's too early to know if the long term benefit is going to be worth doing it in teenagers. In teenagers you face the problem of whether you're operating on the kids for them and dealing with the parents. It does require commitment psychologically, emotionally, and mentally and lots of teenagers aren't ready to do that," said bariatric surgeon Dr. Kenric Murayama.


For now, Chock hopes this tool kit will help Hawaii's pediatricians help their patients to win the battle against the bulge.

"If we can get our kids to learn it right, at a younger age group, presumably they'll take it into adulthood and avoid a lot of the problems that are associated with being overweight," said Chock.

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