



NHHS...in the news...

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Newport Hospital begins early reading program

Reach Out and Read gives books to young children

NEWPORT - Getting books from the doctor will soon be a routine part of pediatric checkups for young children at Newport Hospital and Health Services, as doctors and other medical staff begin the Reach Out and Read program to the practice.

Newport Hospital and Health Services joins 175 other medical clinics in Washington state that are preparing young children to succeed in school. The program is sponsored by the Newport Hospital and Health Services Foundation.

Reach Out and Read is a parenting and early literacy program that helps children be ready for kindergarten by partnering with doctors to prescribe books and encourage families to read together. Doctors and physician assistants incorporate Reach Out and Read's evidence-based model into well-child checkups from ages 6 months through 5 years.

Medical providers give each child a developmentally and culturally appropriate children's book to take home and keep. As they do so, they model and teach parents how to support language and literacy at home. Families leave each visit with the book and the skills to go home and read with their child, knowing how to support their development over time.

"Reach Out and Read is an efficient and effective way to support how young children learn. The program builds on the trusted relationship between families and their child's doctor," said Dr. Jill Sells, a pediatrician and Reach Out and Read Washington State's Executive Director. "Children are excited to receive the books, parents are eager to learn how to support their child's developing skills, and medical providers are thrilled to do something they know helps children be ready for kindergarten."

Dr. Geoff Jones is the local program's medical administrator and spearheaded starting the program in Newport.

Jones said the health problems he sees in the community are primarily caused by poverty - substance use, teen pregnancy, dental disease, obesity and tobacco use. He said the only way to treat these is to improve the economic lives of patients.

"The most effective way to reduce poverty is through education - pretty clear these days that even with the exorbitant costs of education, the more education the less likely a person is to live in poverty," Dr. Jones said. "Research is now showing that the more words a child is exposed to by age 3 (the first 1,000 days) the higher their academic performance in all

phases of education."

He said that as a physician, to get to the root cause of many of the community's problem, he needs to promote reading and talking to kids in the first three years of life, and emphasize preschool and advocate for all-day kindergarten. Both have been shown to improve college performance.

"I have been doing this for a while but then ran into this program and it really seemed to fit," he said.

Foundation Director Jenny Smith said deciding to support the Reach Out and Read Program was a no-brainer.

"The Foundation Board didn't hesitate to jump behind these efforts to improve literacy.

Smith said the foundation is exploring grant opportunities to provide books for older children, as well.

In Washington, at least one in four kindergartners enters school without age-expected language and literacy skills. Children who start behind have difficulty catching up, and typically will not read proficiently by the end of third grade.

For more information about Reach Out and Read at Newport Hospital and Health Services, or if you would like to donate funds or volunteer, contact Smith at 509-447-7928 or visit www.NewportHospital-AndHealth.org.