

PRESCRIBING PRODUCE FOR HEALTH¹

Judi Gerber[©]

As reported in the New York Times² some doctors and community organizations are trying an innovative approach to promote healthy eating and to fight childhood obesity in low-income families. They are encouraging patients to get fresh farmers' market produce by "prescribing" fresh vegetables.

Under the pilot program, called the "Fruit and Veggie Prescription Program" or "Fruit & Veggie RX," doctors are giving at-risk patients vouchers for \$1 a day that can be used for each family member at a local farmers' market.

The program is not only designed to get patients to increase their intake of fruits and vegetables, but to measure how this increased produce consumption affects blood pressure, weight and Body Mass index (BMI), blood sugar levels in pre-diabetics, and weight gain in pregnant women.

The pilot program is being conducted at a community health center in Skowhegan, Maine, at primary care practices in Portland, Maine, and at community health centers in Holyoke, Lawrence and Boston, Massachusetts. The Massachusetts health centers in the pilot already have children's healthy weight clinics, part of the Children's Healthy Weight Initiative, a "multi health center initiative to reduce pediatric obesity."

The program will run until late fall which is the end of the farmers' market season in the region. Program administrators are hoping to work with local supermarkets to make it a year-round program.

Funding to kick off the pilot program came from the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture and the non-profit, Wholesome Wave with the rest coming from another non profit foundation, called CAVU (Ceiling and Visibility Unlimited) CAVU already supports the Children's Healthy Weight Initiative.

CAVU and Wholesome Wave are working together to administer the program. Both groups work to help improve the health and wellness of low-income kids and adults.

Wholesome Wave, "aims to positively impact the health and wellness of historically excluded communities through direct economic links supporting America's small farmers." And CAVU "identifies and supports innovative community programs and services that enhance the healthcare of underserved children."

¹ Care2, Healthy & Green Living, August 17, 2010

² Natasha Singer, Eat an apple (doctor's orders), The New York Times, August 12, 2010