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Finding Healthy in Affordability

Courteney Tucker
Faculty Sponsor: Carolyn Hames, Nursing/Honors Program
Project Mentor: Meredith Artigas, RD

As part of my schooling at the University of Rhode Island's College of Nursing, I completed a community health rotation in the fall of 2010. During this rotation, I was given the task of completing a semester long project on something that I felt my aggregate site was in need of. I was placed at the Cranston Head Start for my aggregate site, and had the pleasure of working with the school nurse and a classroom of about 20 three to five year olds.

The problem identified within the first few months of being at Head Start was childhood obesity, which reflects a growing trend in American society. While attending a Health Advisory Committee meeting at the Head Start, I learned that there was concern about the number of over weight children in the program. Meredith Artigas, Head Start's registered dietitian, told the committee that 43% of the children at Head Start are overweight or obese. She felt that Head Start needed to be more pro-active at addressing this problem with families.

One of the mothers who attended the meeting spoke up and said that one of the hardest parts of being on a tight budget was having to be creative with the meals. She said, "You find yourself relying on the same types of meals, and then of course your family complains so you pick up the frozen dinners, pizza, fast food, etc." This sparked my interest of turning this problem into a project, the creation of a recipe book. I felt that the Senior Honors Project would be the best way to do so.

So, I set off in my quest to collect nutritious, yet affordable recipes. With the help of family, friends, and the staff and families at the Head Start, I was able to accomplish this goal and create a recipe book for these families. I fulfilled the nutritious aspect by analyzing each recipe with my project mentor, Meredith Artigas. In order to determine the affordability of these recipes, I created a price list of every ingredient contained within the book.

This project not only allowed me to further explore the field of community health, but also gave me the opportunity to gain knowledge on skills and resources that will help me to better educate and communicate with my future patients as a registered nurse. Since I plan on working in labor and delivery, nutrition is a major area that patients need to focus on, but may not always be educated in. It is my hope that this project will aid me in improving my skills at educating and providing resources that will better my patients' health. Since labor and delivery services reach a very diverse population, I also wanted to gain knowledge on resources I can utilize to enhance my communication techniques with future patients. It is my ultimate goal to be able to further explore this field so that I may provide the best care towards a very diverse patient population.