HMSA FOUNDATION, JABSOM PEDIATRICS JOIN TO FIGHT DEADLY OBESITY EPIDEMIC AMONG ISLAND CHILDREN

By Tina Shelton

Elizabeth is 16. She first began to think of herself as “fat” in the 7th grade. “I didn’t like the way I looked in the mirror. It made me sad.”

Kirstyn, 17, looked at family photos and decided she didn’t like the way she looked. “I went on a diet, and I can say I lost 45 pounds.”

Childhood obesity is an epidemic that doctors say is starting younger--as early as in infancy--and can have dire consequences.

“By the year 2035 to 2050, the survival and the age of people in the United States will decrease by five years. And it’s related to these high risk factors: hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease,” said Dr. Raul Rudoy, Chair of Pediatrics at the John A. Burns School of Medicine.

“This is going to be a group of children who die before their parents, because it’s going to have disease much sooner,” Rudoy continued. “They’re going to start having diabetes and heart disease, having heart attacks when they happen to be in their 30’s instead of having heart attacks in their 70’s or 80’s like is happening currently.”

But there is good news. Through outreach by Dr. May Okihiro of JABSOM’s Pediatrics Department, both Elizabeth and Kirstyn have lost weight and are maintaining their losses. And more children like them are going to be helped by a new grant. The Hawai‘i Medical Service Association (HMSA) Foundation has provided $419,790 over three years to help establish the Hawai‘i Initiative for Childhood Obesity Research and Education (HICORE) within the Department of Pediatrics.

“We hope to begin to address the problem in a unified way,” said Dr. Okihiro. “To bring different groups together, people from public health, from academia, the Department of Health and the community. By pulling everyone together and coming up with ideas we can overcome the problem at a societal level.”

“We are grateful to the HMSA Foundation for their willingness to partner with us in this important endeavor,” said Jerris Hedges, MD, MS, MMM Dean and Professor of Medicine, Barry and Virginia Weinman Endowed Chair. “With the increasing reports of high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes in children - diseases once thought to be prevalent only among adults - the need for a comprehensive and collaborative effort to better understand obesity in our young people is critical,” he said

“We’re very pleased to support HICORE in its efforts to combat childhood and adolescent obesity in our community,” said HMSA Senior Vice President and VP HMSA Foundation Cliff K. Cisco. “Obesity poses a serious health concern for our children and Hawai‘i’s health care system. The work of HICORE will go a long way to address this concern, and the HMSA Foundation is proud to support this important work.”
MAORI EXPERT DR. MASON DURIE TOLD A gathering at the John A. Burns School of Medicine that health issues his people face in New Zealand are not all that different from the challenges Native Hawaiians confront here.

Durie, the Deputy Vice Chancellor and professor of Māori Research and Development at Massey University, New Zealand, spoke at the invitation of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health at Hawai‘i’s medical school.

Durie said health disparities -- including higher rates of diabetes and heart disease suffered by the Māori population -- are one trouble our native peoples share. But, in his view, there is a bigger, more powerful trait the two groups share: resilience.

“Resilience is a characteristic of indigenous peoples in modern times,” said Durie.

Dr. Durie said resilience can flourish when we become dedicated to seeking out success, rather than just studying failure. He said that involves an “attitudinal shift, from placing an emphasis on disadvantages, disease, and deficits to attainment, success and high hopes.”

“The potential has never been greater,” he said, noting increases in both the life expectancy and the numbers of young people in New Zealand. Durie said 1984 was a key year for the Māori, because it brought a “reawakening” of the needs and status of Māori people in New Zealand. New Zealand found that building the health care workforce with Māori people had a direct impact on improving Māori health.

Durie said professionals in the mental health services were the first to begin to deliver consistent health care to the Māori, Durie said. They adopted a type of medicine that the people could relate to: one that was more like the people themselves. It included emphasizing a balance between mental health and spirituality and taking into consideration the environment and social relationships among the people.

“The Māori began to understand that their health was in their own hands,” said Dr. Durie.

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The progress has been measurable.

Now each tribe in New Zealand has its own health committee. Where there were five Māori medical students in 1984, there are 25 now. The workforce grew during that period from fewer than 50 Māori health workers to 250 today.

And most significant, infant deaths are down and life expectancy is up.

NEW PARTNERSHIP: Dr. J. Keawe Kaholokula, Dr. Mason Durie, Dean Hedges, Dr. Marjorie Mau

Durie’s Massey University and the UH John A. Burns School of Medicine’s Department of Native Hawaiian Health signed a memorandum of understanding to promote the sharing of knowledge.