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School based prevention and management of childhood overweight and obesity

Childhood obesity is now a worldwide problem. Almost every country around the globe is experiencing increasing rates of overweight and obese children. Left unmanaged, this trend will eventually result in an exploding epidemic of adult obesity, type-2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension and cardiovascular morbidity and mortality. The United States childhood obesity rates are among the highest in the world. The state of Mississippi has the highest rates among the 50 states in the United States. A decade ago, a local foundation, The Bower Foundation, determined to turn most of its resources to addressing the challenge of childhood obesity. This effort is used here as an example of a successful strategy to address the issue of childhood obesity at a population level. A multi-prong strategy was initiated to use school based programs to bring about change. Move to learn is a simple approach to increase physical activity for children during school hours. Few schools in Mississippi have dedicated times for physical education. This program integrates 10 minutes exercise sessions throughout the school day into the regular academic curriculum. The title of the program emphasizes to teachers that use of the program will not only improves physical health, but improves academic performance. Nutrition programs were begun in schools to decrease the use of fried foods and to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. Elimination of sugar based beverages from vending machines in school was part of the nutrition strategy. Policy initiatives with state government were critical in achieving some of the program's goals. Over the first years of the effort, childhood obesity rates for the state decreased from 25.5% to 23.7%, one of the few states to achieve a decrease in rates over that time.

Biography

Daniel W Jones has received his Medical education and Internal Medicine training at The University of Mississippi Medical Center where he presently works as a Professor of Medicine and the Director of Clinical and Population Science for the Mississippi Center for Obesity Research. He has served as the Dean of the School of Medicine and Chancellor of The University of Mississippi. He is also the Past President of the American Heart Association.

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