For immediate release

New $2.9M study to help obese Latino kids eat better, play more through family counseling, text messages

SAN ANTONIO (May 12, 2014)—A new obesity management program will use family counseling, text messages and newsletters to control weight and spark healthier eating and physical activity habits in obese/overweight Latino kids, thanks to a five-year $2.9 million federal grant awarded to researchers at the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Researchers will develop and test the six-month program among 230 child-parent pairs in three pediatric clinics of the University Health System.

Half the child-parent pairs will get in-clinic counseling on how to make healthy changes.

The other half will get the same in-clinic counseling—plus phone counseling and culturally tailored text messages and newsletters to reinforce changes suggested through counseling.

“We believe kids in the more intensive group will significantly improve their body composition, increase their physical activity levels, consume more fruits and vegetables and fewer sugary drinks, and decrease their sedentary habits, like watching TV,” said Dr. Deborah Parra-Medina, the study’s principal investigator and a professor at the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at the UT Health Science Center.

About 39% of Latino kids ages 2-19 are overweight or obese, compared to 32% of all U.S. kids.

Research indicates that Latino kids tend to have more limited access to physical activity options and healthy food, contributing to obesity and related health issues, like diabetes.

Parra-Medina’s new obesity management program will tackle many of these factors.

Counseling will focus on consuming more fruits and vegetables and less sugar-sweetened beverages, limiting screen time and being active at least one hour a day. Strategies to improve eating habits include eating breakfast daily, eating more meals at home, eating meals as a family most days, and allowing the child to self-regulate his/her meals.

Parra-Medina and her colleagues will develop content for culturally tailored newsletters and text messages to reinforce those concepts. Dr. David Akopian of UT San Antonio will implement the text messaging system.

The team will measure the impact of the program on body composition, insulin, glucose and cholesterol levels, and health behavior changes, like fruit and vegetable consumption.
“We think this will become an effective way to reduce and prevent obesity in Hispanic families,” Parra-Medina said.

The study is funded by the National Institutes of Health’s Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development.

Others from IHPR faculty and staff involved in the study are Cynthia Mojica, PhD, assistant professor, and Laura Esparza, MS, project coordinator. Others from the UT Health Science Center at San Antonio involved in the study are: Carisse Orsi, MD, assistant professor of pediatrics, and Yuanyuan Liang, PhD, assistant professor of epidemiology and biostatistics.

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The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, one of the country’s leading health sciences universities, ranks in the top 3 percent of all institutions worldwide receiving federal funding. Research and other sponsored program activity totaled $231 million in fiscal year 2011. The university’s schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, health professions and graduate biomedical sciences have produced approximately 28,000 graduates. The $736 million operating budget supports eight campuses in San Antonio, Laredo, Harlingen and Edinburg. For more information on the many ways “We make lives better,” visit www.uthscsa.edu.

The Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) at The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio investigates the causes and solutions to the unequal impact of cancer and chronic disease among certain populations, including Latinos, in South Texas and the nation. The IHPR, founded in 2006, uses evidence-guided research, training and community outreach to improve the health of those at a disadvantage due to race/ethnicity or social determinants. Visit the IHPR online at http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu or follow its blog at http://www.saludtoday.com/blog.