New Valley-based exercise lab unveiled

Institute for Health Promotion Research’s new lab at the Regional Academic Health Center will promote clinical rehab, research and teaching in South Texas

HARLINGEN, Texas (June 29, 2011)—More than 30 percent of adults are obese in South Texas, a higher percentage than in the rest of Texas.

That’s why the Institute for Health Promotion Research (IHPR) is opening its Clinical Exercise Research and Teaching Center at its satellite office at The UT Health Science Center’s Regional Academic Health Center (RAHC) in the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

The new center, the first of its kind in the region, will serve as an exercise rehabilitation facility and health promotion site for local residents, as well as a hub for research on obesity-related chronic diseases and teaching for medical and exercise science students.

Officials unveiled the center at a “lab-warming event” June 28, 2011, at Room 1.309 at the RAHC’s Clinical Research Unit, 2106 Treasure Hills Blvd. in Harlingen.

“We’ll be able to provide an individualized, comprehensive exercise intervention approach to Valley residents, while also gaining the ability to conduct on-site research and teach the next generation of scientists,” said Dr. Dan Hughes, the IHPR researcher who will direct the new facility. IHPR researchers Rose Annie Treviño and Gabriela Villanueva will staff the facility. “This kind of facility is much-needed in the region as evidence of the benefits of exercise for all populations continues to accumulate.”

The center will start enrolling study participants this month.

State-of-the-art exercise devices fill the center, including a metabolic cart, ECG machine, two treadmills, two cycles, strength-testing and flexibility equipment and more.
This equipment will pave the way for researchers to examine the effect of exercise on people’s health and quality of life. For example, researchers will conduct fitness assessments and exercise interventions for research projects aiming to help Latino cancer survivors.

The center is expected to open to the public at a later date.

At that time, residents who are referred to the center will be given specific exercise prescriptions based on their fitness capacities, medical history and personal goals, Hughes said.

The center also will allow students to work with certified exercise specialists to hone their skills in fitness assessment, goal-setting, exercise program development, training, and maintenance phases involved in individualized exercise prescriptions.

“Students will learn how to work with patients who have co-morbidities, like cancer and diabetes, to develop tailored exercise programs,” Hughes said. “This type of hands-on experience will provide exercise science students with knowledge and clinical hours necessary for their degrees and certifications, and medical students will better understand how precise exercise programming will benefit their future patients.”

The outcomes of the rehabilitation, health promotion, research and teaching aims of the center will be will be publicized in the community and region.

“This facility will help address the many health disparities affecting the Lower Rio Grande Valley,” Hughes said. “We’re excited about what we’ll be able to accomplish.”

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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 $228 million in fiscal year 2010. The university’s schools of medicine, nursing, dentistry, health professions and graduate biomedical sciences have produced approximately 26,000 graduates. The $744 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 University of Texas 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 San Antonio, 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, such as education or income. Visit the IHPR online at http://ihpr.uthscsa.edu or follow its blog at http://www.saludtoday.com/blog.