OUTREACH IMPACT
One of the many ways in which Cedars-Sinai demonstrates its strong commitment to community is by organizing hundreds of programs that address the health needs of vulnerable, underserved populations in the Los Angeles region. In fiscal year 2009, these programs involved a total of 199,664 participant encounters and 5,756 different activities, including health clinics and screenings for early diagnosis and referral, preventive health education, and patient and family counseling.

FLU PREVENTION
More than 500 seniors and others in high-risk groups received free flu and pneumococcal immunizations in fiscal year 2009 at Cedars-Sinai clinics held around Los Angeles as part of the medical center’s effort to protect community health. Over the next few months, a number of immunization clinics will be offered at senior centers, churches and synagogues to help protect seniors and others during the current flu season. For more information, call (310) 423-9581.

Grocery Shopping 101
Nine women are huddled around Joyce Culwell in the bread aisle of Ralphs market at the corner of Crenshaw and Slauson, comparing labels to find a brand that puts “whole wheat” or “whole grain” at the top of the list of ingredients.

“Look for at least three grams of fiber per serving,” said Culwell, who works in Community Health at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and is leading this Wednesday evening “Grocery Store Tour.”

The women make notes on a label-reading worksheet, then divide into small groups. They head to the dairy section to check for differences in the amounts of fat and calcium in various brands of milk, yogurt and cheese.

HELPING IS CONTAGIOUS
Medical Residents Care for Homeless
It’s a hot Thursday afternoon in July in downtown Los Angeles. The waiting room at the free clinic across the street from the Los Angeles Mission’s homeless shelter on Skid Row is full.

In a small exam room down the hall, Rebecca Martin, M.D., a third-year internal medicine resident from Cedars-Sinai, is seeing patients, most of whom wear badges indicating they have come from the shelter. (The “Mission clinic” was started by the Los Angeles Mission, but is now run by Los Angeles Christian Health Centers.)

Cedars-Sinai resident Rebecca Martin, M.D., performs physical exam at Mission clinic on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles.
Medical Residents Care for Homeless

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Martin takes notes as she questions a middle-aged man and learns he is on medication for diabetes, hypertension and depression. During a physical exam, she notices a blister on his foot that could be related to his diabetes and cautions him to keep an eye on it. “Do you have any other shoes?” she asks. “I worry that these are rubbing.”

After completing paperwork to order blood tests and medication refills, Martin is ready for her next patient. While the cases on this day are routine, she always takes time to learn about the patient’s health history as well as current symptoms—and is always on the lookout for serious conditions that need immediate attention.

Treating Wide Range of Conditions

Every two weeks, Martin dedicates an afternoon to working at the Mission clinic or at the Saban Free Clinic (formerly known as the Los Angeles Free Clinic). She’s one of many Cedars-Sinai residents who provide health services at free clinics around Los Angeles as part of their training.

“I love this work,” Martin said. “It’s satisfying to help people, and I learn a lot from making decisions about how to treat a wide variety of diseases.”

Lisa Abdishoo, M.D., medical director of Los Angeles Christian Health Centers, which runs the Mission clinic, said such work can be “like practicing in a Third World country at times.”

“People come to us with some pretty advanced conditions because they’ve gone without medical care for so long,” Abdishoo said.

Limited Resources

The time Cedars-Sinai’s residents spend at the clinic increases its capacity by nearly 2,000 patient visits a year, Abdishoo noted. "Every morning we have a long line of patients. More than half get turned away, so every bit of help makes a big difference."

Abdishoo completed her residency at Cedars-Sinai in 1999. Working in free clinics as part of her training made such an impact on her that she decided to dedicate her career to providing medical care for the homeless. She said a number of doctors who worked at the clinic as residents have continued to help out after going into private practice.

Martin said that her clinic work is challenging and frustrating because the resources needed to meet patients’ health needs are so limited. However, she added, “the care we’re able to provide is very good — and the patients are very grateful.”
Women who are determined to get fit find that they work harder and have more fun when they get in the habit of exercising together.

The Healthy Habits program is offered by Cedars-Sinai at several Los Angeles elementary schools where at least 75 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced-fee lunches.

Claudia Gutierrez, the Cedars-Sinai Community health liaison who leads the workshop, encouraged the Arlington Heights participants last spring to arrive a half-hour early to exercise together. They walked laps around the playground, and when the workshop ended in May, they decided to continue on their own over the summer.

**Getting Results**

“It’s exciting to see how motivated they are — and to see that they are feeling better as they exercise more,” said Gutierrez, who made arrangements for the group to exercise on weekday mornings at St. Paul’s Church once school closed for the summer. Gutierrez also continued to support their efforts, providing T-shirts and exercise mats from Cedars-Sinai and occasionally offering instruction on topics such as how to cook healthy meals.

“I have more energy now,” said Julia Ayala, whose children, ages 2 and 6, watched her exercise and sometimes joined in. She finds it difficult to exercise regularly on her own. “It’s a lot more exciting with more people,” she said.

At the end of each session, the women gathered in a huddle and reached toward the center to touch hands. Neal offered parting words encouraging them to keep exercising every day. “We’re going to be healthy,” she said after one rigorous workout. “We’re going to be beautiful.”

Julia Ayala (right) went to St. Paul’s Church to exercise with other young mothers regularly over the summer. She said the workouts gave her more energy. Her two children, ages 6 and 2, watched and sometimes even participated in the sessions, which grew out of a Healthy Habits for Families workshop offered by Cedars-Sinai at Arlington Heights Elementary School.

Participants in Cedars-Sinai’s Healthy Habits for Families workshop met regularly on their own over the summer at St. Paul’s Church in Los Angeles for exercise sessions led by Aleli Neal.

“March... Knees up... Higher!” Aleli Neal shouts over the upbeat dance music she brought to inspire the group of about 20 women who joined her at 8 a.m. for a one-hour exercise session in a classroom at St. Paul’s Church in Los Angeles.

Neal, a remarkably fit grandmother who volunteered to lead the group in exercise, worked as hard as the much younger women who followed her every move. She had the women working every muscle group over the course of an hour, and she kept their interest by integrating dance moves into the calisthenics.

The group first gathered last spring in a free, 10-week workshop called Healthy Habits for Families at Arlington Heights Elementary School. Neal has a grandson at this school, but most of the workshop participants were parents whose children attend Arlington Heights.
A Headstart That Started From the Heart

TEEN GETS HER SCRUBS AND BEGINS WORKING TOWARD HER DREAM OF A CAREER IN NURSING

Chiqui Perez was just starting elementary school in the Philippines when she first set her sights on a nursing career. At age 6, she lost her father to cancer, and she vividly remembers being at his side when he died.

“I witnessed how my dad suffered, and ever since then, I’ve wanted to be a nurse to help save lives,” she said.

Now a 17-year-old student at Fairfax High School, she is getting a head start toward her goal by participating in Cedars-Sinai’s Youth Employment and Development (YED) program, which is generating interest in healthcare careers at a time when there is growing concern nationwide about workforce shortages in the medical field.

Chiqui worked part time in the Critical Care unit at Cedars-Sinai during her junior year and full time over the summer in Critical Care and the Emergency Department. She performed a variety of behind-the-scenes tasks that gave her an opportunity to observe nurses and ask questions. During her senior year, she will work two hours a day at the hospital while receiving additional mentoring and classroom instruction to help her prepare for college and develop some basic professional skills.

Using Earnings to Help Family

Like many YED students, Chiqui contributes the wages she earns to help support her family. The straight-A student came to the U.S. from the Philippines with her mother four years ago. Her three older siblings and grandmother stayed behind, and her mother works long hours in a restaurant to earn enough to help support them. “She works so hard, and I want to help her as much as I can,” Chiqui said. “I’m really thankful for YED because now I can take care of my own expenses.”

“She’s paying for her own braces through this program,” added her mother, Elizabeth Perez. “It’s wonderful because she’s being exposed to the medical field, and she’s learning to be independent. I’m really proud of her.”

Chiqui said she is even more determined to become a nurse now that she’s had a chance to see first-hand what the job involves. “I’m learning that you have to be tough to be a nurse — you have to be there for patients no matter what.”

AN EDUCATION IN THE REAL WORLD

Working at Cedars-Sinai is a “first step into the real world” for most of the high school juniors and seniors involved in the medical center’s Youth Employment and Development (YED) program, said Andrea Perry, the program’s director.

Cedars-Sinai partners with Fairfax High School to provide a combination of classroom education and on-the-job experience over a two-year period. Each student is paired with a Cedars-Sinai employee who serves as a mentor.

“They learn about different types of jobs in the healthcare field and develop skills such as how to manage their time and communicate effectively,” said Perry, a graduate of Fairfax High who has run the program since it was started in 1993. “We try to build a foundation and give them good skills to take wherever they go. I want them to know they can do anything they want as long as they set their mind to it.”

About 50 students participate in YED each year. Many come from disadvantaged homes, but nearly all YED students go to college. Many continue to work at Cedars-Sinai during their college years, and a number of graduates have been hired by the medical center or ended up working for other employers in areas such as nursing, pharmacy, physical therapy, social work, medical research and hospital administration.
Shopping Intelligently

This is the last of four 90-minute sessions in the Grocery Store Tour program, which was launched in November 2008 by Cedars-Sinai in partnership with the Los Angeles Urban League. This pilot program is offered a few times a year to “change the way people shop and help them eat healthier,” said Culwell, who has a master of science in public health and also teaches “Healthy Habits” workshops for school children in low-income areas of Los Angeles.

Culwell enlists the help of store employees, including produce managers who provide tips such as how to choose a good melon or tomato.

Zakkiyya Akram, a young adult librarian at Hyde Park-Miriam Matthews Library who participated in the Ralphs tour, said the experience motivated her to switch from white to brown rice and from whole to 2 percent milk. She also has become an avid reader of food labels.

“Don’t go to the market when you’re hungry; you may buy too much food if you shop on an empty stomach.

• Make a grocery list and stick to it. This will help ensure you’re covering all food groups and cut down on unhealthy impulse buys.

• If you usually buy red meat, try lower fat alternatives like fish and skinless chicken. Ground turkey is a good, low-fat alternative to ground beef.

• Stock up on frozen vegetables, so you’ll always have them readily available. The nutrients are the same as in fresh vegetables.

• If you need to buy potato chips, go for the ones that are baked. And don’t eat them straight out of the bag. Instead, place a small portion on a napkin and put the rest away.

Culwell also recommends the following strategies for making healthy choices:

Taking Lessons Home

Angela Lee, a mother of two teenagers, is another tour participant who took the lessons home to her family. “I wanted to learn about nutrition so I could lose weight, and I also showed my kids how to read labels when they shop,” she said.

D’Ann Morris, deputy neighborhood health officer of the Los Angeles Urban League, observed the recent Ralphs tour. “Most people buy the same things all the time when they do their grocery shopping,” she said. “This program helps give people a real understanding of what they’re buying so they can be proactive about improving their health.”
Roxy Szeftel, M.D., has two titles at Cedars-Sinai. Officially, she's director of Child Psychiatry, but she's “Dr. TV” to the children she helps through interactive videoconferences.

Most of these children live in remote areas of California where child psychiatrists are scarce. But the innovative Telepsychiatry Developmental Disabilities Service that Szeftel created in 1997 has given them access to the care they need.

Through “teleclinics,” rural doctors consult with Szeftel and other experts at Cedars-Sinai who have the latest knowledge on how to treat psychiatric disorders in children with autism, Asperger’s syndrome, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and mental retardation, among other developmental disabilities. Szeftel helps to get the right diagnosis and medication for these children, and also addresses behavioral, social and academic issues. “We want to help these kids lead lives that are meaningful,” she said.

Learning by Observing

Teleclinics are arranged through California Department of Developmental Services regional centers. Szeftel and the medical students and residents she teaches as head of Cedars-Sinai’s Child Psychiatry Training Program sit in a conference room facing a big-screen TV. She starts each session by discussing the day’s cases with her students, offering pointers to help them learn how to do quality psychiatric assessments. Then the video connection is made and the child appears on the TV screen, along with parents, a regional center coordinator and perhaps a physician and/or behavior therapist. Szeftel and her students carefully watch the child’s behavior as they get information from the adults.

“More than half of the children speak less than 50 words, but we can tell a lot by observing them,” said Szeftel, who follows up each consultation by sending recommendations to the child’s primary doctor.

Improving Quality of Life

Bonny Hulsy, R.N., telemedicine coordinator at the Kern Regional Center in Bakersfield, says Cedars-Sinai’s telepsychiatry program has significantly improved quality of life for many children.

“These kids can’t deal with being on the road for five hours and then waiting in a doctor’s office,” she said. “Instead, they come to a quiet, intimate environment. They like television so they are relaxed about seeing the TV doctor. Roxy and her team have helped many children to be able to stay at home with a loving family rather than live in an institutional setting.”

Contact Information

For more information about this newsletter, please contact Joyce Culwell, MSPH, at (323) 866-2970.

Tele-encouragement

During a recent “teleclinic,” Roxy Szeftel, M.D., has encouraging words for the parents of Aaron Swain, an autistic child whose telepsychiatry consultation was arranged through the Kern Regional Center in Bakersfield. After observing Aaron playing with toys and hearing him say more words than she had expected, she tells his parents: “This kid is going to talk. He’s on his own path, and language is coming on his own time.”