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Vaccinate: Yes or No? Research to Help Parents Decide

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- What started as a brief hallway conversation between colleagues has now turned into a grant-funded research study about how motivational interviewing may influence parents' decisions about vaccines.

Last year, Dr. Justin Cole, vice chair of pharmacy practice, and Dr. Aleda Chen, assistant dean of pharmacy practice, had a short conversation about how parents make decisions regarding vaccines for their children. That conversation prompted research into published studies on the topic and when they found a gap in research, a proposal for a research grant was written.

In the fall, the Merck Investigator Studies Program (MISP) awarded a research grant to Cole and Chen for an in-depth study about how motivational interviewing may influence parental decision-making in this critical area of health care.

Cole and Chen hope to examine how parents of children 6 years of age and less make decisions about vaccines, with the goal of creating a tool to help them make the best choice through motivational interviewing.

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative conversation between healthcare providers and their patient. Patients are encouraged to do most of the talking to allow the health care provider to understand their reasoning and thinking styles, not just their decisions. This approach could be a tool for health care providers of all types to speak with families with whom they've built relationships.

In order to accomplish their goals, Cole, Chen and their team have partnered with the Rocking Horse Community Health Center in Springfield, Ohio, to conduct their research. The center is a perfect setting because it is a federally qualified health center and offers medical care to an underserved population. Serving the underserved is a goal of the Cedarville University School of Pharmacy.

"It is important for Cedarville University to engage in these kinds of studies because we value innovation in teaching, service and scholarship," said Cole. "We hope to answer health care questions and solve complex health care problems in novel ways. We have a sincere desire to serve others with excellence, and part of that is improving health care. These studies also give students a unique opportunity to participate in research and author scientific papers before they graduate."

"I was assigned to this research study, but I would have chosen it anyway," said Julia Gardner, third-year professional pharmacy student and a student researcher for the study. "I knew I wasn't good at research, so I decided to participate to grow that skill. Now I find joy in research, especially with this study since I hope to go into pediatrics."

The money from the grant program will be used in part to pay the study staff of three students who collect and analyze data, contact families in the study and publish the research results. The funds will also be used to support the training for health care providers should this new method be successful.

After the planning stage, the study is expected to take 12 months, with an additional six months of analyzing data and writing manuscripts to share the results. Overall, the process will take approximately two years.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,193 undergraduate, graduate and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings and leading student satisfaction ratings. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.