

PRESCRIBING NATURE TO ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SUCCESS STORY



Typically, patients and parents at well-child visits are asked how many hours they spend in front of a screen, how many sugary beverages they drink and how many servings of fruits and vegetables they consume. In pediatric clinics in San Mateo County, an additional question is asked, “How much time do you spend in nature, not counting physical education?”

Adding the nature question came from Dr. Rachel Borovina, a Champion Provider Fellow who is an outdoors enthusiast herself. She believes that spending time in nature not only increases physical activity, but is a powerful stress reducer, especially for the low-income parents of her patients who are balancing so many difficult issues.

That’s why she created San Mateo County ParkRx, a program where physicians “prescribe nature” to their patients. “Once people are outside, they naturally start moving,” Borovina says. Her goal is to introduce people to the parks system who traditionally haven’t felt welcome. She says that she wants them to know that there are available, affordable and safe places for them and their families to be physically active.

To create this initiative, she and Dr. Sharon DiPierro, another San Mateo County Champion Provider Fellow, enlisted the support of other pediatricians to prescribe nature to their patients. She also partnered with the county health department to provide nutrition education and arrange for special day-in-the-park events. The San Mateo County Parks Foundation underwrites day passes for parks that charge admission to eliminate obstacles to accessing the parks.

To reinforce the nature message, each patient receives a written park prescription that lists the reason for the prescription, the benefits of spending time outdoors, and park visitor information

“San Mateo County ParkRx promotes connection between the clinic and nature. As a pediatrician, I witness the health benefits children and their families receive from being in nature. The parks are taking care of my patients while my patients learn to take care of the parks.”

Dr. Rachel Borovina, San Mateo, Pediatrician

In addition, nature photographs now decorate the clinic walls and examination rooms.

Borovina credits the Champion Provider Fellowship for giving her the opportunity to use her voice for community good. Since becoming a Fellow she has spoken to the San Mateo Park and Recreation Commission about the ParkRx program, been featured in The Friends of Huddart Park and Wunderlich Parks newsletter, was quoted in an Almanac News article, The Nature Cure, and been a presenter at the Healthy Parks, Healthy People Bay Area Forum as well as the Children in Nature Network International Conference.

“The Fellowship provided the framework and training and empowered me to elevate my efforts to support my patients beyond the walls of my clinic and to advocate for programs that support the health of the entire community.”

The Champion Provider Fellowship empowers, trains and supports doctors and dentists to use their expertise and respected voices to improve the health of communities through policy, systems and environmental changes.

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