Faculty and Students Co-Author Paper on School Personnel Perceptions of Obesity Prevention Programs

Faculty and students at the East Tennessee State University College of Public Health have co-authored a paper that looks at the perceptions of school personnel on adolescent obesity prevention programs.

The group, all from the Department of Community and Behavioral Health, surveyed personnel from five randomly selected high schools in southern Appalachia. The survey identified perceptions about the importance of obesity as a threat to health, as well as perceptions about school-based physical activity and nutrition programs, and other programs to support overweight/obese students. Obesity was widely identified as a major health problem in each school. Despite this fact, most programs that could provide resources for overweight/obese adolescent, were not universally available, and were only available to those students who specifically sought them out. Because Tennessee currently has one of the highest rates of obesity in the nation, there is a clear opportunity for schools to focus additional resources on overweight and obese adolescents.

The article, titled "School-Based Adolescent Obesity Prevention Programming: Perceptions of School Personnel in Southern Appalachia." was published in the February 2015 edition of the Southern Medical Journal. The lead author is Jodi Southerland, DrPH, Clinical Instructor. She was joined by Department Chair, Dr. Deb Slawson as well as Christian Williams, DrPH, and Taylor Dula, MPH who were both students at the time the data were gathered.

The data for the report was originally gathered as a part of a Public Health Systems course taught by Dr. Southerland.

Dean Randy Wykoff pointed out "One of the great advantages of our commitment to using real-world data and community-based partnerships as a part of our students' learning experience, is that our students can see, first hand, how to collect relevant data, and how to analyze and present data that are truly important to the community." He added "That a class project would result in publication in one of the Nation's most-widely read journals is a great reflection on the Department and its teaching philosophy."