



CONTACT:

David Haney, Director of Strategic Communications
University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria
309.671.8404 | dhaney@uicomp.uic.edu

\$250,000 American Cancer Society grant to fund College of Medicine research on childhood obesity

PEORIA – (January 2, 2014) How doctors talk to parents and their children about nutrition, obesity and physical activity may prove key to lasting, improved health among kids, including reducing future chances for getting cancer.

A local pilot project using “Motivational Interviewing” – a patient-centered type of conversation – paired with a brief survey has shown promising results for improving healthy behaviors in children. Thanks to a \$250,000 grant from the American Cancer Society, doctors and researchers at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Peoria (UICOMP) are now preparing to expand that study.

“This changes the framework of conversation between providers and families to be more patient-centered,” said Amy Christison, M.D., the project’s lead investigator. “Instead of telling families what to do, providers partner with families to help them explore what lifestyle behaviors they feel are important and can improve.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends providers screen a child's weight status during well-child visits and counsel about nutrition and physical activity, but Dr. Christison says providers are challenged with how to accomplish this efficiently and effectively in a manner that is useful to families. “Research like this might help to prevent obesity early in childhood so that children can live healthier and longer through adulthood,” she said.

The study, beginning in January, will involve 12 offices within three healthcare systems servicing Peoria, Tazewell and Woodford counties over the next two years.

A Clinical Assistant Professor of Pediatrics at UICOMP, Dr. Christison is the medical director of Healthy Kids U, a pediatric weight management clinic at the university and Children's Hospital of Illinois. She also is a pediatric hospitalist at UnityPoint Health – Methodist.

By the Numbers: Approximately 36.4 percent of Peoria-area children and adolescents are overweight and 19.4 percent are defined as obese. That’s above the national average of 32.2 percent and 17.1 percent, respectively. Seventy-five percent of teens who are overweight will continue to be overweight as adults. Childhood obesity is linked to increased risks for adult cancer, diabetes and heart disease.