

Childhood Food Insecurity: Health Impacts, Screening, and Intervention

Free online course empowers the medical community to address food security

Hunger and food insecurity affect one in five Oregon children. And for Anne Hoisington, that's one too many. "Families that are food insecure may have *enough* food, but not the *right* food that provides the proper balance of nutrients," she says. A nutrition education specialist with OSU Extension Family and Community Development in the Portland metro area, Anne understands the consequences of poor nutrition — frequent illness, developmental and academic problems, underweight or, paradoxically, overweight. "There are many community resources, but not everyone knows about them," she says. "We realized that the medical community could have an impact if they included food security in regular patient screenings."

As a member of Oregon's Childhood Hunger Initiative, Anne led the design of a survey given earlier this year that gleaned responses from 200 doctors and nurses who said they wanted to learn more. "The survey was an eye opener — pediatric practitioners are concerned about their patients, but many are not sure about how to ask questions, discuss the issue, and provide interventions and referrals. Most said they would welcome a standardized screening questionnaire to identify risk for household food insecurity," Anne explains. "And they were receptive to the concept of an online course, particularly if continuing medical education credits were offered."

The group partnered with OSU's Ecampus to design an online course. "We had representatives from the Childhood Hunger Initiative, Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, Providence Health System, Oregon Department of Human Services, and Oregon Health & Science University — experts in all aspects of the course, and the energy and commitment was phenomenal," says Anne, who hopes the course will be a national model. Anyone can take the free course at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/hunger, which takes about an hour to complete.

Anne encourages Oregon health practitioners to take the course, then take steps toward proactive interventions. "When they do, we'll be here to help," she says. "We're invested in education and outreach to help our state's children. They have enough challenges today; hunger shouldn't be one of them."



Questions? Contact Anne at
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"Our ultimate goal is to develop a standardized tool to screen patients for food insecurity and to provide interventions," says OHSU's Dr. Dana Hargunani (left), a member of the Childhood Hunger Initiative Leadership Team. **"Once health practitioners understand the incidence and consequences of food insecurity, we're more likely to test for things like anemia and micronutrient deficiencies and look for the mental health and behavioral consequences of poor nutrition."**



Josh Sanz, OHSU Communications