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AAP News

How to set your patients on a path toward a lifetime of physical activity

by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor

Editor's note: *The 2019 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Oct. 25-29 in New Orleans.*

It's not surprising visitors to the Grand Canyon find it awe-inspiring. After all, it is considered one of the seven natural wonders of the world. But life-changing?

It was for Natalie D. Muth, M.D., M.P.H., R.D., FAAP, who as a teenager hiked the canyon with her mom.

"It was such an eye-opening challenge for me; it changed the course of my life," Dr. Muth said. "From that experience, I decided that I wanted to help other people feel a similar experience from physical activity and exercise."

Dr. Muth went on to become a fitness instructor and a personal trainer, and eventually a pediatrician.

"Ever since then, I have been involved in promoting and supporting people to be more active in various ways. It naturally extends to pediatrics and helping children, my patients, find activities that they love to do," said Dr. Muth, director of the WELL Clinic at Children's Primary Care Medical Group in Carlsbad, Calif.

Dr. Muth will discuss the 2018 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans as they pertain to children during a session titled "Couch Potatoes No More! How to Help Your Patients Meet Physical Activity Guidelines" from 4-5:30 p.m. Monday, Oct. 28 (S4222) in rooms 217-219 of the convention center and again from 8:30-10 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 29 (S5053) in room R09. She will be joined by Blaise A. Nemeth, M.D., M.S., FAAP, a member of the AAP Section on Obesity, Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, and associate professor of orthopedics and rehabilitation at University of Wisconsin.

"We will explore how pediatricians can provide age- and developmentally tailored physical activity guidance to their patients across a wide range of possible patient presentations, including ages, abilities, interests and medical conditions," said Dr. Muth, incoming chair of Section on Obesity Executive Committee and a member of the Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness.

The most important factor for children in adopting a physically active lifestyle is finding activities that they think are fun, while also having a safe, convenient and affordable place to engage in those activities, she said. Many families, however, face barriers to meeting activity goals outlined in the guidelines.

Motivational interviewing is one strategy pediatricians can use to help families identify solutions to those challenges. "Patients often have more doable ideas than ones that we might suggest," Dr. Muth said.

"The benefits of physical activity for children are tremendous, including but extending beyond improvements to physical health, weight and mental health," Dr. Muth said. "Pediatricians are uniquely positioned to help patients from the youngest ages develop the abilities, confidence and desire to meet physical activity guidelines and be physically active for life."

For more coverage of the 2019 AAP National Conference & Exhibition, visit <http://bit.ly/AAPNationalConference19>.