EXERCISE AND NUTRITION PROGRAM IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL SETTING
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Background and Significance: The American Heart Association (AHA) in their scientific statement (2012) has identified suboptimal diet and physical inactivity as leading causes of preventable diseases globally. As a nation, the long term ramifications of this preventable condition are evident. Obesity has detrimental effects on the health of children and their families, and there are tremendous medical costs that arise from obesity. Prevention of childhood obesity and providing these children and their families with the life skills to practice a lifetime of healthy habits needs to be a priority in healthcare.

Purpose: In middle school age children (ages 11-14), how does an after school health program focused on nutrition and exercise compared to non-coordinated episodic intervention affect levels of knowledge of nutrition, exercise, and motivation to incorporate healthy habits and BMI levels, over an eight week period.

Sample/Population: 11 middle school male students and their families participated in the after school program.

Framework: Bandura's theory of self-efficacy was used for the basis of this translational research project.

Method/Approach: An optional after school exercise and nutrition program was implemented at Aldrich Middle School in Beloit, Wisconsin. The School District had some programs in place to address childhood obesity but the interventions were episodic and non coordinated. This after school program was eight weeks long and incorporated 1 hour of physical activity, 45 minutes a week of nutrition education. There were two evening family sessions of nutrition education. The overall outcome measures that were evaluated in this program included student BMI level, knowledge of nutrition and exercise, and motivation to incorporate healthy nutrition and exercise behaviors into their life.

Results/Outcomes: Eleven male students participated in the eight week after school program. Only 2.1% of the student body participated in the program making the results descriptive in nature. Overall, parents and students who participated seemed to enjoy the program and would recommend it to family and friends. They rated the exercise portion more enjoyable than the nutrition portion. They reported positively that the program increased their self esteem. BMI data was not significant overall, but one student went from the obese category to the overweight category.

Conclusions/Implications: The project produced a small sample size that did not represent the overall school. No generalizations can be made from data. There was a change in BMI data over the eight week period. It was a community collaboration that was cost effective and comprehensive. A larger more diverse, longitudinal study is needed to determine if there are significant health benefits over time for children.