



# Collaboration for Early Childhood Care & Education

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## **NOTES FROM THE FIELD: INCREASING DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENINGS AND REFERRALS**

*Rebecca Barbato, MD*

Six months ago, the Physicians Network received a CATCH grant from the American Academy of Pediatrics to look at the developmental screening process. In order to learn about what works and what doesn't work, we held several focus groups across the spectrum of early childhood service providers and parents.

The most striking thing that I learned from the focus groups was that parents don't think that pediatricians or family practice doctors are responsible for evaluating their children's development. Instead, they see doctors as responsible for their children's physical health. I was also surprised to learn that parents almost always hear about Early Intervention from neighbors and friends rather than from their doctors. Knowing this has caused me to change my practice around developmental assessment.

Now, I am more deliberate about explaining to parents what I am looking for as I conduct a developmental screening and as I gather information from them. I also talk about Early Intervention routinely with families, whether they need it or not.

As part of the grant, we worked to understand communication barriers around screening and the provision of developmental services. In response, the Healthy Beginnings II project has provided us a pilot Standard Referral form that is available via download from our website. Importantly, it has a place on the form for physicians to indicate that they want to receive a summary report about the patient and their eligibility for services.

We developed two helpful resources for physicians. The Developmental Referral and Screening Directory contains information about the EI Referral Process, the Referral Process for Early Childhood Special Education, contact information for both systems and resources for developmental services.

The Collaboration's website has a resource and information area for physicians: [www.collab4kids.org](http://www.collab4kids.org). The Standard Referral Form, the Developmental Referral and Services Directory, the PDF forms of the MCHAT and the Edinburgh screen for postpartum depression, and links to sites that provide more developmental screening tools. Check it out!

## Pioneering Healthy Communities

Oak Park is one of 16 communities selected by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to participate in an initiative to reduce the epidemic of childhood obesity through community-wide systemic policy changes focused on increased physical activity, better nutrition and healthy environments. A leadership committee composed of Oak Park leaders from village government, school districts, park district, health-care institutions and philanthropy convened in Washington, D.C., for a YMCA of the USA-sponsored conference to develop policy and strategies as a community to combat this escalating public health issue.

Team member and Collaboration Executive Director Carolyn Newberry Schwartz commented, "We learned that infants have a higher rate of obesity if they have mothers who were obese during pregnancy. It's critically important to work with children and families in the early years to make substantial changes lifestyle behaviors. This needs to be an entire community effort." Team members will develop a plan to be initiated in the fall.

## Community Health Assessment and Strategic Plan

As part of the requirement for maintaining state certification, the Oak Park Health Department will be preparing and submitting its IPLAN, a community health assessment and strategic plan, to the Illinois Department of Public Health in the next few months.

The IPLAN, which is completed every five years, requires that a representative group of community stakeholders review local community health and demographic data, prepared by Health Department staff. Stakeholders are then given the opportunity to provide input based on their own perceptions of health problems in the community. The result of the process is a list of priority health issues and a community health plan to address those issues over the next five years.

Oak Park residents interested in reviewing community health data, as part of the community stakeholder's group, are invited to contact the Health Department at 358.5492 or by e-mail at [health@oak-park.us](mailto:health@oak-park.us).

Our mission is to make sure that all children (birth to age 5) in our local community arrive at kindergarten safe, healthy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn.

[www.collab4kids.org](http://www.collab4kids.org)

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Physicians Network

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