

Family Doctors Continuing the Fight Against Tobacco

by Margot Savoy, MD, MPH

For over a decade the Delaware Academy of Family Physicians (DAFP) has been delivering Tar Wars®, an annual national tobacco-free education program to fourth and fifth-grade students across Delaware. In the past 3 years alone Tar Wars® has reached nearly 2,000 Delaware students with a strong message about the dangers of tobacco. The national Tar Wars® program was retired in 2014. DAFP, with the support of the AAFP and American Lung Association, has continued to support the school and community-based work. Considering Delaware ranked 18th for the percentage of our youth in grades 9-12 who currently use any tobacco product, DAFP is not yet ready to end the program anytime soon.

“We have to continue sending clear and consistent messages about the dangers of tobacco use to our school-aged children. New products like e-cigarettes and flavored tobaccos are threatening to reverse the positive gains we have seen in recent years, and we simply cannot let that happen.” says DAFP board member, Margot Savoy, MD, MPH, FAFP.

According to Christiana Care Health System Family Medicine resident Raema Mir, MD who has been leading the DAFP Tar Wars® team for over a year, it “is a fun and informative program that brings together teachers, health professionals, and students. The program supplements school education on nicotine and tobacco abuse and gives a forum for students to directly address questions to a health expert. The students are armed with awareness of the tactics used by the tobacco industry. We also touch recent trends e.g. vaping and legalization of marijuana.” Currently the program is only offered at 4-5 schools a year although over one hundred schools are invited annually to schedule the hand-on interactive presentation. Mir says “Tar Wars® is a great tobacco-free education opportunity, and I would like to see us partner with more schools in the future.” Most of the presentations are currently given by resident family physicians; however, in the past DAFP has also trained practicing physicians, nurses, and health professional students to deliver the content.

One major highlight of the program is an opportunity for students to enter into a poster contest where they create their own tobacco-free message to share with their peers. The quality of the entries is always extraordinary, and Dr. Mir is “always impressed by the honesty, curiosity, and creativity of our students.” In the past winning posters entries have received prizes like monetary awards and Blue Rocks tickets. To arrange a DAFP Tar Wars® presentation or to get more information, please visit our website at www.delfamdoc.org or contact us at dafp@delfamdoc.org.

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