

ENCOURAGING PATIENTS TO ENJOY **NATURE**

HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SUCCESS STORY

As a child, Dr. Cinnie Chou loved being outdoors enjoying nature, hiking, running around and feeling free. She once considered a career as a park ranger. Today she is a family practice physician at the Pittsburg Health Clinic, where she takes care of a large number of children with pediatric obesity. In contrast to her childhood, she was shocked to discover two-thirds of her patients, many of whom are low-income immigrants, rarely go outside. Dr. Chou knew she needed to change this unhealthy paradigm by introducing them to the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD), which offers 120,000 acres of open space and unlimited free activities in its 65 parks.

Encouraged by the Champion Provider Fellowship, she decided to share her childhood memories of being active and her love of nature with her patients. In partnership with the EBRPD and Contra Costa Health Services, Dr. Chou created a pilot park prescription program and began arranging "A Day in the Park" visits for her patients. Mona Koh, community relations manager for EBRPD, arranged transportation and provided naturalists and park rangers as guides. The families meet Dr. Chou at the clinic, enjoy a healthy snack and discuss healthy eating. Then they get on the bus and off they all go to a regional park.

The whole experience was eye opening for her. She says, "I didn't realize how important safety was to my low-income patients until I started taking people out. It was amazing to see how much the children loved being in the park."

"Thanks to the Champion Provider Fellowship, I'm sharing my love of being active in nature with my patients. My dream is they'll tell everyone about how much fun their families are having being healthy."

Dr. Cinnie Chou, Contra Costa County, Family Medicine

"Dr. Chou is an enthusiastic park champion who is building bridges between many different communities," says Koh. To remind patients of the East Bay's vast natural resources, EBRPD gave the Pittsburg Health Clinic large-scale photographs of the various regional parks to display on their walls.

Impressed with Dr. Chou's enthusiasm and passion for making changes, her employer, the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center, Health Centers and Detention Health, recently gave her four hours a week to devote to expanding the park prescription project. Dr. Chou is now lending her expertise to the *Contra Costa Partnership for Health in the Outdoors* initiative.

"Dr. Chou is a true champion who is making system changes. She doesn't just tell patients to go outside. She goes with them," says Gwenn White, nutrition and physical activity specialist with Contra Costa Health Services.

The Champion Provider Fellowship empowers, trains and supports doctors and dentists to use their expertise and respected voices to improve the health of communities through local policy, systems and environmental changes.

Learn more at championprovider.ucsf.edu

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