

Community Health Providers Reach Out to Promote Health Literacy to K-12 Students

Reaching children of all ages to promote health literacy is all in a day's work for East Central Mississippi Health Care providers Gaydon Nowell, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, and Sallye Miley, Pediatric Nurse Practitioner.

The health professionals recently participated in the Union Co. School's K-12 Health Fair. The theme of the presentation was 'Healthy Bodies, Healthy Minds.'

"ECMHCI enjoys partnering with local schools to educate students and staff on the importance of good mental and physical health," said Jill Bishop, CEO of East Central Mississippi Health Care.

Miley, who is an alumnus of Union Co. schools and parent of a current student there, said they had an opportunity to tell the children what nurse practitioners do, and to provide facts and tips for well-being. "We covered topics of exercise, to nutrition, to safety," said Miley. "Gaydon (Nowell) covered topics of positive relationships, sleep and less screen time." Miley also said the common theme of screen time came up with all ages of students, which sparked discussions, especially among teens. "This is one of the biggest issues across age and socio-economic groups," said Miley. "Everyone has a phone."

She said many times screen time isn't monitored and screens are available to children at bedtime. This can affect sleep patterns. "When we don't get enough sleep, that affects our physical and mental health." According to Miley, school-aged children need several hours of sleep: 3-5-year-olds need 10 – 13 hours per night; 6-12-year-olds need 9-12 hours, and 13-18-year-olds need 8-10 hours of sleep.

Even though Nowell says that the stigma still exists around mental health, she was pleased that students asked questions to become more health literate about these conditions. "We also let them know it was ok to talk about mental health issues and to ask for help," said Ms. Nowell. "Mental health is part of health."

Both Miley and Nowell hope to do more school visits to promote a culture of health in their communities.

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