

Reach Out and Read sites across the country train doctors and other healthcare professionals to talk with parents about the importance of reading as a standard aspect of their pediatric care and to give new books to children at Well Child visits from 6 months to 5 years of age with a special focus on children at risk. At Ochsner, this program has established reading corners and engaged volunteer readers to create a literacy-rich environment in waiting areas. By building on the unique relationship between parents and medical providers, Reach Out and Read encourages early literacy skills so children enter school prepared for success in reading. The impact may be greatest for economically disadvantaged children who represent over 20% of our patient population. In addition, outreach into community clinics serving high-risk children staffed by our residents has been incorporated into our program.

### **Getting Started**

Ochsner pediatricians and pediatric residents have been trained to discuss the importance of reading with pediatric patients and families. The training has been developed and tested by the national Reach Out and Read program for over two decades. Ochsner began training pediatricians at the main campus during the summer months of 2009 and are in the process of training pediatricians across the system in anticipation of the program's expansion in 2010. The Reach Out and Read pilot program was launched on May 29, 2009 by Ochsner physicians and Louisiana First Lady Mrs. Supriya Jindal and Ochsner CEO Dr. Patrick Quinlan. Mrs. Jindal was our first storyteller for a group of eager children in the atrium of the Ochsner Children's Health Center.

Between the ages of 6 months and 5 years of age, children have regularly scheduled Well Child pediatric visits. At each visit, a child will receive a new, developmentally-appropriate book. During the clinic visit, the pediatrician will incorporate the book into the visit to evaluate childhood development such as motor skills and comprehension and to encourage reading in the family. By the time a child is 5 years old, he or she will have received at least 9 new books to begin a personal library that encourages reading and prepares the child for success in school and a lifetime of reading. Ochsner pediatricians already report a great reception from both parents and children and note that it is a pleasure to enrich the pediatrician-patient relationship through Reach Out and Read.

### **Financial Support**

Through generous donations from Ochsner physicians and staff, pediatric fundraising programs, donated books from the state and national Reach Out and Read programs and generous grants and gifts of books from local benefactors we have been able to raise over \$80,000 which will pay for all programs into 2011. Ms. Blanche "Dee" McCloskey in the Department of Philanthropy has served as our program philanthropy director.



Ochsner is partnering with local authors, national booksellers, and reading programs and is seeking financial support from businesses, individuals and foundations. Reach Out and Read has national partnerships with major booksellers that allow official sites to purchase books at reduced costs, and the national program offers support and assistance to ensure the success of programs across the nation. Ochsner hopes to inspire corporate and foundation philanthropy as well as support from generous individuals to provide future support for the program. This may include support through special event fundraisers, individual solicitations, or grant requests.

### **How We Will Know We Are Making a Difference**

In the first months of programming in 2009, over 1400 books were distributed to children at the Ochsner Children's Health Center. Our volunteer department trained 10 individuals who have provided over 100 hours of reading to children in our waiting room. It is estimated that roughly 20% of the books that were distributed went to financially disadvantaged children.

Nationally, Reach Out and Read has been shown to be highly effective in numerous peer-reviewed studies. Families who participate in Reach Out and Read are significantly more likely to read to their children, and children served by the program score higher on vocabulary tests. At Ochsner, we hope to evaluate the program through future surveys of families in our practice as well as surveys of participating physicians. Data will be collected regarding the number and age of children served as well as the number and type of books distributed.

### **Looking Ahead to our Second Year**

We will soon complete physician and staff training at all Ochsner general pediatrics outpatient clinic sites. Training of all Tulane-Ochsner pediatric residents occurred during house staff orientation in June. Grand openings with guest readers in Baton Rouge (3 sites), Destrehan, Slidell, Covington and Metairie were scheduled for the first quarter of 2010. We are partnering with Louisiana Reach Out and Read to supply books to be Mobile Pediatric Health Unit, Covenant House of New Orleans and the New Orleans Health Project. The children presenting to these resident continuity of care clinics represent particularly high risk patients.

Ochsner Health System has one of the largest primary care pediatric networks in our region with 32 general pediatricians seeing patients in 8 clinics. In 2009, these pediatricians supervised over 150,000 outpatient visits. All of our sites will be on board in the 2010 and we anticipate distributing over 15,000 books to our young patients. This is a very exciting prospect that we anticipate will make a significant impact in our communities.



We are also proud of a new program that was initiated at Ochsner called “Operation Read”. In this intervention, we distribute new books to young children with cleft palates attending the Craniofacial Team Clinic during their intensive 4 hour morning evaluation by a team of 8 health care professionals. It is recognized that the most significant outcome measure in the successful habilitation of children with cleft palate is their speech and language skills. For children with cleft palates to have excellent speech, it requires optimal surgical, dental/orthodontic, audiologic and psychosocial care; thus, emphasis on child literacy needs to be a critical focus of our care of these children. Finally, we hope to expand Ochsner Reach Out and Read into Ochsner Reads which will include a focus on the needs of illiterate adults in our patient population. A particularly important concentration will be in the area of medical literacy for these patients.

The creation of Ochsner Reach Out and Read represents a pediatrician-driven attempt to improve the literacy of children in our local communities in the context of the well-child encounter.