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From: Missouri Area Health Education Centers

## **HEALTH PROFESSIONS STUDENTS DEVELOPING PATIENT/PUBLIC EDUCATION SKILLS**

Health professions students spend much of their time studying science and learning clinical skills to deliver high quality patient care. The Missouri AHEC (MAHEC) network offers programs helping students succeed in both of these tasks.

There's another skill that all health professionals need – the ability to communicate complex information in clear language. Patients who have and understand the information needed to make healthy choices can be better partners in their healthcare. The MAHEC network provides opportunities for pre-professional and health professions students to begin mastering this patient/public education skill early in their careers.

One such opportunity is getting underway in the Kirksville area. Truman State University students are collaborating with A.T. Still University staff and faculty to develop and provide community education programs focusing on nutrition.

The students' initial effort is directed toward educating elders on ways to reduce sodium in their diets. Sodium is a contributor to high blood pressure and a variety of heart related conditions. Current dietary guidelines recommend limiting daily sodium intake to between 1,500 and 2,300 mg a day, most Americans consume approximately 3,400 mg a day. Using a presentation they developed entitled "Salt's Fault - Eating for Healthy Heart and Blood Pressure", the students are sharing this important health message.

A second focus will be encouraging restaurants in the Kirksville area to make added reduced sodium meal options available to customers. Training for servers and cooking staffs will provide suggestions on how to address the needs of customers trying to reduce the sodium in their diets.

By offering opportunities like these to pre-professional and health professions students, the Missouri AHEC is preparing them to improve the health of their communities and future patients.

The initiative is sponsored by the A.T. Still University Aging Studies Project, ATSU AHEC Program, the Truman State University Health Science programs, and numerous community partner agencies.



*Senior Truman State University Health Science students Joe Zempel and Michael Gibson present "Salt's Fault" program to Kirksville community group as part of the overall sodium reduction initiative.*

*MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the numbers of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the numbers of professionals caring for underserved populations.*

*The MAHEC partners include:*

- A.T. Still University – Kirksville
- University of Missouri – Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC – St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC – St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC – Springfield

***MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health***