

April 12, 2010

A taste of their own medicine

CALGARY – A new program that gives nursing students a chance to taste palate-offending medications is helping clinicians develop strategies to make medicine more palatable for young patients.

For the past several months, students from nursing programs at Mount Royal University and the University of Calgary have been coming to the Alberta Children’s Hospital to taste test some of the medicines commonly prescribed to young patients, including iron supplements, antibiotics and steroids.

“This is an opportunity for future health-care professionals to identify and experience what a child goes through when they’re taking medications, and shed some light on why they might not like taking them,” says Tim Kraft, an Alberta Children’s Hospital pharmacist who organizes the taste testings. “We provide strategies on how to give the medications to the child without having to wear them.”

Students learn when treats such as chocolate, candy and popsicles can be used to mask the bad taste of some medication. They also learn strategies and techniques for successfully administering medications to their future patients.

The student nurses and residents share this advice with parents, who often need to continue medication therapy when the child returns home. “If we can assist in that, then we’re reaching our ultimate goal,” says Kraft.

Alberta Children’s Hospital registered nurse Zenaida Roxas says awful-tasting medicines are a fact of life for many young patients. The medication must be taken to get better.

“Kids can go septic if they don’t get antibiotics,” says Roxas, a Mount Royal University nursing instructor. “Steroids are used to treat patients with extreme asthma. If airways get inflamed and obstructed, these medications can help open them.”

The taste-testing program enhances patient care, while also providing a valuable learning experience for participating students.

The tastings are safe, as students receive only a drop of each medication.

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