

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Simms/Mann Institute “Think Tank” Talks Health and Wellness at the Wallis in Beverly Hills



Simms/Mann “Think Tank” at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

By Sandra Sims

The Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts hosted the Sixth Annual Simms/Mann Institute “Think Tank” on Oct. 28, bringing together a diverse group of physicians, psychologists, educators, and other childcare professionals. The program began with an introduction by Simms/Mann Institute Founder and President Victoria Mann Simms, PhD, who introduced the program’s theme of “Rituals, Routines & Body Rhythms: The Simple and Profound Impacts of When

We Eat, Sleep, and Play for Health Across the Lifespan.”

The interdisciplinary “Think Tank” addressed topics such as sleep, nutrition, mindfulness, and music as they relate to the overall health of children and their families. The fires that erupted that day near the Getty Center were also discussed as one of the featured presenters, Susan Kaiser Greenland, was evacuated from her home earlier that day. In spite of her circumstances, Greenland showed up ready to discuss mindfulness. Presentations also

covered health issues related to the ever increasing obesity and diabetes epidemics, as well as with anxiety, which Dr. Mann Simms described as the leading mental health issue among American youth.

“The goal of our think tank has always been to translate cutting edge brain science into everyday practice,” she noted. **Circadian Body Rhythms: Sleeping, Eating and Exercise**

Dr. Mann Simms discussed the three circadian body rhythms: sleeping, eating, and exercise.

“Our complex and over stimulating lifestyle significantly contributes to the enormous physical and psychological stress on families and children,” she said.

Disruptions to the natural rhythms can create insomnia, obesity, anxiety as well as attention and learning issues. Dr. Satchin Panda, professor at the Salk Institute in La Jolla and author of “The Circadian Code” continued the discussion by elaborating on the connection between sleep and eating patterns. “When your eyes are open, your mouths are open,” said Dr. Panda. He explained that the circadian clock regulates behavior, physiology, and metabolism. For example, about one-third of adults get approximately five hours of sleep as opposed to the recommended eight hours or more and are more likely to eat randomly throughout the day, which could cause obesity. Dr. Panda recommended “time restricted eating” where one eats during certain times of the day and stops eating two to three hours before going to bed. Dr. Panda noted that a blue light sensor in the eyes may affect our sleep-wake cycle and bright screens on television, phones, or other smart devices negatively impact one’s ability to sleep. He also explained how lack of sleep can lead to other health issues such as depression. Additionally, Dr. Panda shared a new app that is part of his research which can be used to track food intake, exercise, and sleep to better understand body rhythms. Those who are interested can visit mycircadianclock.org for additional information.

The Importance of Routines for Children

Speakers Dr. Jodi Mindell, Associate Director of the Sleep Center at the Children’s Hospital, and Dr. Wendy Slusser, Associate Provost at UCLA, emphasized the importance of sleeping and eating routines for children to promote health benefits. Both Drs. Mindell and Slusser also agreed that children should have limited screen time for television and smart devices.

According to Dr. Mindell, “Sleep is a window into what is happening in a child’s life ... if a child is not sleeping well, it’s an indication often that something else is going on.” She explained that sleep patterns may be 1) medically related (e.g., sleep apnea, sleep walking), 2) behaviorally based (e.g., caffeine, screen time), or 3) related to other things that affect the child such as anxiety, household chaos, and possibly neighborhood safety. Dr. Mindell recommended that parents have a bedtime routine chart that includes specific time for tasks that signal that it is time to get ready to sleep and help children to self-regulate. She stated that the model for bedtime routines should include nutrition (e.g., healthy snacks), hygiene (e.g., brushing teeth, bathing), and parent-child

bonding during activities such as story time. She also pointed out the importance of establishing culturally responsive routines. For example, she stated that in India and other places, taking a bath at night may not be considered culturally appropriate. Dr. Mindell explained that the bedtime routines help children sleep longer and better.

Dr. Slusser discussed the importance of children having a routine for nap time, TV/screen time, family meal time, and exercise. It’s important to incorporate a routine or ritual around family meal times such as each person sharing something he or she is grateful for before beginning a meal. Recognizing that children need to eat more fruits and vegetables and drink fewer sugary beverages, Dr. Slusser said that traditions are important for building long term positive eating behaviors. She also stated that walking five times a week for 30 minutes is a good exercise routine for children and that parent training in sleeping, exercising and eating techniques have reduced incidents of pediatric obesity.

Stress and mindfulness awareness

The presentations also included a unique approach to stress relief by Jill Heinerth, inductee in the inaugural class of the Women Diver’s Hall of Fame. Heinerth explained how cave breathing can be used for regulating emotions for stress relief.

Presenter Susan Kaiser Greenland, a leader in mindfulness and meditation for children, also spoke about regulating emotions. She shared an example of a snow globe as a good analogy for what happens when people are stressed and anxious. She explained that the snow represented stress and described mindfulness in terms of the settling of the snow when one can see more clearly. “Mindfulness is not about perfection; it’s about being present,” said Greenland.

Benefits of music on brain development and social behavioral skills

Dr. Assal Habibi, Assistant Research Professor of Psychology at the Brain and Creativity Institute at USC, shared the results of a study where children who learned how to play musical instruments developed better cognitive and social/emotional behavior skills than children who were not exposed to learning how to play musical instruments. Dr. Habibi pointed out that this study represents why it is important to fund music courses in schools. Unfortunately, these programs are typically the first to be discontinued due to lack of funding.

Award Presentations

The Simms/Mann “Think Tank” event also included presentations of the Whole Child Award which were created in 2015 to honor the work of those who have made a significant impact on the health and wellness of child development. This year’s recipients included the Visionary Leadership award to Samuel J. Meisels, Founding Executive Director, Buffett Early Childhood Institute at the University of Nebraska (Visionary Leadership award); David Schonfeld, MD, Director of National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement (Medicine award); and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, PhD, The Debra and Stanley Lefkowitz Distinguished Faculty Fellow at Temple University and Senior Fellow at Brookings Institution (Community Education Award).



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