

*Success Story:*  
**Teaching Medical School Students  
About Working with People  
Who Have Disabilities**



**Disability and Health Program**  
kansans with disabilities can be healthy

**Summary**

Health care professionals must understand that people with disabilities can be healthy, and that they should participate in physical activity as much as people without disabilities. The Kansas Disability and Health Program will offer first and second year medical students at the University of Kansas School of Medicine an opportunity to learn about the key issues and challenges involved in caring for people with disabilities through a week-long enrichment course. Learning objectives for participants in this elective course are to:

- Understand health disparities experienced by people with disabilities
- Learn how to address communication, access and attitudinal barriers
- Understand employment and health care issues experienced by people with disabilities

**Challenge**

People with disabilities experience significant health disparities and often have difficulty accessing needed medical care. At the same time, research has shown that physicians often do not have accessible equipment in their offices and may not know how to support healthy behaviors for their patients with disabilities.

Kansans with disabilities experience substantial health disparities. In 2015, only 12.8 percent met physical activity guidelines, though most reported wanting to be more physically active. Similarly, 73% of Kansans with a disability are overweight or obese. These figures underscore the strong need to improve accessibility to health promotion and physical activity programs for people with disabilities in Kansas.

Yet, many physician offices do not have accessible scales for wheelchair users to assess their weight and research has shown that physicians are less likely to ask patients with disabilities about their smoking and exercise habits.

“I thank you for this. I wish I had had this week early in my training. In fact, I have NEVER been given an experience like this during any part of my training, and have had to piece together information, experiences and reflections on my own.”

*-Jana K. Zaudke, MD, MA  
Director, Honors and Enrichment  
University of Kansas School of Medicine*



Photo: Florida Office on Disability and Health

## Solution

One of the strategies of the Kansas Disability and Health Program (DHP) for improving health for people with disabilities in the state involves working with health care providers. In our first year, we sought to identify opportunities to provide education to medical, oral health, and allied health students on working with people who have disabilities.

As a faculty member at the University of Kansas Medical Center, the Kansas DHP program director learned of a new Enrichment Program for first and second year medical students. The Enrichment Program designates four separate weeklong sessions during the 2017-18 academic year for medical students to select short courses on topics of interest to them. The Kansas DHP director met several times with the Enrichment Program director to explore the possibility of an Enrichment class focusing on working with people with disabilities.

## Results

As an outcome of these meetings, the Kansas Disability and Health Program has received approval to offer Enrichment Week educational programs for first and second year medical students during the October 2017 Enrichment week and potentially in additional Enrichment weeks throughout the academic year.

The course will be offered to a maximum of 10 students per session. Outcome data and evaluations will be available in November 2017.



## Sustaining Success

As these physicians enter practice, they will be better aware of how to make their services accessible to people with disabilities and how to support improved physical activity and health outcomes for this population. Over time, these changes should help to address health disparities for Kansans with disabilities.

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## Promoting Access to Facilities and Services

Many medical practices do not provide accessible scales (like the one shown at left) for people using wheelchairs and others who have problems with balance or standing. Yet knowing a person's correct weight is important for monitoring that individual's health and prescribing medications.

*Photo: University of Kansas Marketing Communications*