

Ardmore institute gift launches Culinary Medicine Program at OU-Tulsa

As an emergency room physician, Lori Whelan spends a lot of time treating patients who suffer from chronic diseases.

"When we see someone come in with a heart attack, save their life, and then see them come back three months later with the same issue, this shows how medicine isn't always addressing the root of the problem," said Whelan, a practicing emergency room physician at Hillcrest Hospital in Tulsa.

"In emergency," she said, "we treat 'em and street 'em."

Whelan is quick to acknowledge that there's a gap in the way doctors are trained to practice medicine in the United States, and she says change is under way at medical schools across the country, including at the OU-TU School of Community Medicine.

Diet can be just as important to long-term wellness as pharmaceuticals, Whelan said, adding she's observed that truth in her own life. "Most doctors get very little nutritional education," she added. "There's a lot of new research that shows food can be used to prevent disease, and it can be used to heal."

Whelan, an associate professor at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, has joined registered dietitian and assistant professor Marianna Wetherill to establish OU's first Culinary Medicine Program with the support of a \$172,000 gift from the Ardmore Institute of Health to the OU Foundation.

Both Whelan and Wetherill are board-certified in lifestyle medicine, which is a rapidly growing interdisciplinary specialty that aims to treat disease through evidence-based lifestyle change. Chef Valarie Carter, who also is a master of public health student at OU-Tulsa, completes the three-person teaching team.

Through the program, medical students interact with Carter and learn to cook healthy foods in their own homes while discovering how food can influence certain diseases, Wetherill said. The goal is for students to incorporate healthier eating habits in their own lives so they're in a better position to be role models and share that information with the patients they'll be seeing day to day.

Classes began in early 2018 and the program is gaining popularity among the next generation of doctors and physician assistants who seem to recognize an intuitive link between good health and the things we eat, Wetherill said.

"We see a great deal of buy-in from the medical community, and the medical students are totally on board," Whelan said. Findings from the pilot curriculum were recently published in

the journal *Medical Science Educator*.

As the program's lead dietitian, Wetherill cites scientific evidence linking diet and such diseases as diabetes, cancer, hypertension and heart disease. There's growing evidence that supports a role for nutrition in cognitive disorder prevention and management, including Alzheimer's disease and depression, she said.

Because the Culinary Medicine Program is still new and not fully funded by the medical school, Whelan and Wetherill have reached out for private financial support. The Ardmore Institute of Health is dedicated to improving the

gave \$21,000. Both are based in Tulsa.

"I believe food is medicine, so if food is medicine and doctors prescribe medicine, then we need to know about food just as much as we study the other forms of medicine," Whelan said. "We need to be the experts in food and make it a priority in our treatment plans."



A gift from the Ardmore Institute of Health is helping OU medical students learn how to incorporate healthy cooking into their own lives so they can serve as role models in preventing and treating diseases.

"There's a lot of new research that shows food can be used to prevent disease, and it can be used to heal."

health and vitality of people around the world through the adoption of healthy lifestyle habits, so the Culinary Medicine Program was an ideal candidate for funding.

"They were excited to support it, and we are very grateful to have their support," Whelan said.

Crucial funding also has come from the Hille Foundation, which gave \$25,000 to the program, and the Oxley Foundation, which

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