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#### Backpack Safety Awareness to Prevent Back Pain in School-Aged Children

Aaron M. Gelinne *University of Vermont* 

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Gelinne, Aaron M., "Backpack Safety Awareness to Prevent Back Pain in School-Aged Children" (2017). *Family Medicine Clerkship Student Projects*. 304. https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/fmclerk/304

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#### Backpack Safety Awareness to Prevent Back Pain in School-Aged Children

#### Aaron Gelinne Family Medicine Clerkship, September 2017 Mentor: Michael Corrigan, MD



#### **Problem Identification and Description**

- According to the Consumer Product Safety Commission, more than 6,300 children between the ages of 5 and 18 were treated in emergency rooms for backpack injuries in 2016
- Swanton Elementary School services over 500 children and is the only elementary school in Swanton, VT. Back pain is a bi-weekly complaint with the school nurse.
- Swanton Elementary School currently does not provide any information on proper backpack safety in regards to weight and pack adjustment.
- September 20, 2017 was National School Backpack Awareness Day this was a perfect opportunity to coordinate with Swanton Elementary School to educate parents and children about backpack safety



### **Public Health and Community Costs**

- The prevalence of adolescent back pain approaches 20% similar to that documented in adults<sup>1</sup>
  - 7% of children experiencing lower back pain will seek medical attention<sup>1</sup>
  - I 3.4% of children have reported lost time in school or activities due to backpack related pain<sup>4</sup>
- While not specific to children, the cost of back pain in the United States has been estimated to be approximately \$90.7 billion, not including indirect costs such as lost school time, disability, etc.<sup>7</sup>
- According to Northwestern Medical Center, 25% of the population in Franklin County (location of Swanton Elementary School) has chronic lower back pain – above the national average



# **Community Perspective**

Wendy Culligan, RN Danielle Loiselle, RN Swanton School Nurse: 4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade Swanton School Nurse: 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade "sometimes backpacks look bigger than the "kids have massive backpacks and are often kids at this age and it is hard to tell how carrying overfilled bags, especially ones who much weight they are really carrying" do a lot of after school activities" "it is common to see kids who are hunched "the school tries to do things to minimize carrying loads like having storage bins at over with poor posture and their head down school and getting rid of homework" because of what they are carrying"

"I notice specifically in the winter that kids carry more and more things – and the winter is long in Vermont"

"I think that parents and children are not conscious at all about backpack safety" "parents should know more about backpack safety but nobody teaches this to our parents"

"I see many kids who come in with lower back pain. Sometimes as frequently as every couple weeks"



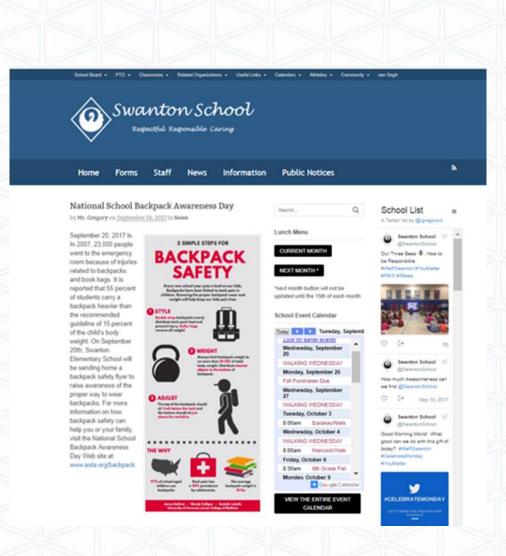
### **Intervention and Methodology**

- Intervention: Educate parents and children on proper backpack safety and the risks of improper use
- Methodology: Design an educational infographic that focuses on backpack safety and notable backpack facts for dissemination at Swanton Elementary School on National School Backpack Awareness Day on September 20, 2017<sup>8</sup>
- The infographic focused on the most widely verified data for proper backpack usage including<sup>2-6</sup>:
  - Style
  - Weight
  - Adjustment
- Provided the infographic to parents and children in a way that reaches the most people
  - School website and social media were identified by the school as being most widely viewed by parents



#### **Results**

- The infographic was reviewed by the Swanton Elementary School staff and a Family Practice physician who commented that the infographic was simple, but effectively provided necessary information to parents
- The infographic was posted on the Swanton Elementary School webpage and multiple school social networking sites
- Each student was sent home with the infographic to give to their parents
- The infographic was provided to the Swanton School nursing staff to use for future events/needs





### **Evaluation of Effectiveness and Limitations**

- The effectiveness of this project could be measured following the educational intervention by:
  - Observing the backpack behavior of kids at Swanton Elementary School to determine before and after effects
  - Surveying the parents using a brief questionnaire that quantifies the quality of the infographic and whether the information was retained
- Limitations:
  - Despite using endorsed means of school-to-parent communication, the number of parents who read the infographic is uncertain
  - The infographic focused on a limited amount of information in regards to backpack safety



#### **For the Future**

- Annually recognize National School Backpack Awareness Day and implement additional interactive activities such as backpack weighing and fitting tutorials
- There are many other factors that contribute to back pain in the pediatric population that could be addressed
  - It would be beneficial to have backpack safety as only a small part of an entire education series on spinal health
- Factors specifically discussed with the school and validated by the literature that could be included in a spinal health series are:
  - Back injuries in athletes
  - Obesity related back pain



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# **Informed Consent**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This project is a requirement for the Family Medicine clerkship. It will be stored on the Dana Library ScholarWorks website. Your name will be attached to your interview and you may be cited directly or indirectly in subsequent unpublished or published work. The interviewer affirms that he/she has explained the nature and purpose of this project. The interviewee affirms that he/she has consented to this interview.

Yes: <u>X</u>

