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(Editors: To hear a podcast interview with Dr. George, go to the <u>Medical Center's podcast page</u>.)

To see more photos of the Farmers Market in Hershey, go to the market's Facebook page.)

MEDICAL CENTER-BASED FARMERS' MARKETS IMPROVE HEALTH

HERSHEY, PA– Farmers' markets at medical centers may contribute to greater wellness in surrounding communities while adding public health value to the mission of a market, say Penn State College of Medicine researchers who have both developed and evaluated a market created at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center.

"Farmers' markets are serving public health by increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, revitalizing neighborhoods, strengthening local economies, and empowering community members to learn more about the items they buy," said Daniel George, Ph.D., assistant professor, department of humanities. "Markets are increasingly viewed as one part of the solution to national chronic health problems."

A growing national trend is creating partnerships that strengthen the abilities of medical centers and clinics to provide complete, patient-centered care and serve community health through farmers' markets. Of the 7,175 known farmers markets in the US, over a hundred are currently located on medical center campuses.

George and scientist Wade Edris, who both work at Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center, started the Farmers Market in Hershey in spring 2010. George and colleagues from the Division of Internal Medicine recently reported the results of their case study in the American Journal of Public Health.

The Farmers Market in Hershey has five goals: increase community access to healthy locally grown foods; support local farmers engaged in sustainable practices; establish opportunities

for community wellness partnerships; build a community space for interaction between employees of a large medical center and residents from surrounding neighborhoods; and pay homage to the agricultural heritage of the land surrounding the medical center.

Efforts to promote healthy eating and lifestyle practices in the community in supermarkets, schools and worksites often show promising shortterm effects. However, these programs often face personnel and resource challenges that stem largely from lack of long-term funding.

"To alter dietary and lifestyle choices over the long term, there is a need to establish settings that can provide a more sustainable supply of personnel and resources. Medical center campuses can be a promising venue for promoting healthful lifestyle changes," George said.

For example, medical center markets can enable nursing and medical students and residents to develop their health screening and program management skills, researchers and graduate students interested in evaluating market-based initiatives, and volunteer staff committed to improving community health. In addition, market vendors can contribute to this sustainability through health-related programming such as healthy food demonstrations, distributing healthy recipes and participating in federal nutrition supplementation programs. Through this sustainable commitment, programs have a better chance to support long-term health benefits for customers.

The Farmers Market in Hershey is held once a week and aims for at least 80 percent organic items for sale, including fruits, vegetables, dairy products, meats, baked goods, coffee, and specialty items like spices, honey, sauces, flowers and prepared foods. Community wellness programming through medical professional-led activities that promote public health education is a major strategic focus that differentiates the Farmers Market in Hershey from other markets. Three rent-free booths are reserved each week for community health outreach.

"The overarching vision for the market was to combine agricultural, medical, and community resources so that the Farmers Market in Hershey will significantly contribute to the long-term health of the region and model how a partnership between a medical center and a farmers' market can provide more comprehensive care for patients and families," George said.

Organizers asked hospital staff to educate their patients about the opportunities to purchase local fresh foods and participate in free wellness programs offered at the market.

"The key differentiating point for a farmers' market located on a medical center campus is the proximity of experts in areas such as medicine, public health, nutrition, kinesiology, and psychology, which enables the market to serve as a credible community venue for powerful public health promotion," George said. Researchers say more analysis needs to be done of the effects of farmers' markets on medical center campuses. The characteristics of market customers, the barriers to attending, and the effectiveness of the market need to be evaluated more closely.

Other authors of the article are Jennifer Kraschnewski, M.D., M.P.H., assistant professor, Department of Public Health Sciences, and Liza Rovniak, Ph.D., M.P.H., assistant professor of medicine.

Penn State College of Medicine, located on the campus of Penn State Milton S. Hershey Medical Center in Hershey, Pa., boasts a portfolio of more than \$105 million in funded research. Projects range from the development of artificial organs and advanced diagnostics to groundbreaking cancer treatments and understanding the fundamental causes of disease.

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