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The AsthmaBUS

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The AsthmaBUS

Asthma is the number one cause of hospitalizations, prescribed therapy, loss of school days and poor academic performance among school children.[1] It represents a problem of staggering social and economic magnitude, particularly in poor and underserved inner-city communities. Since many children with asthma are often undiagnosed[2], educational programs will benefit not only known asthmatics, but also children who may have the disease but are not yet aware of it.

To tackle these issues, investigators at the Center for Research in Medical Education and Health Care of Jefferson Medical College have developed a unique educational vehicle: The AsthmaBUS. This initiative is conducted on behalf of The Philadelphia Asthma Task Force, in collaboration with the Philadelphia School District, and in partnership with Glaxo-Wellcome. It was launched in September together with the opening of the 2000-2001 school year. The overall goals are to increase asthma awareness, improve education and facilitate prevention among Philadelphia middle-school children.

The specific objectives of the AsthmaBUS initiative are centered on three themes: Asthma-See-It; Asthma-Treat-It; Asthma Beat-it(c). More specifically, the program staff of the bus will be:

- Teaching children how to recognize early symptoms of asthma (Asthma-See-It);
- Teaching children how to avoid asthma irritants, allergens and other behavioral and environmental triggers (Asthma-See-It);
- Teaching children about various types of asthma medications (anti-inflammatory controllers and rescue bronchodilators), and how good compliance is key to success (Asthma-Treat-It);
- Teaching children that increased asthma awareness and good control can lead to successful and productive lives, as demonstrated by many athletes, celebrities and historical figures (Asthma-Beat-It); and,
- Educating families of asthmatic children and individuals who interact with these youngsters (such as teachers and school nurses) about asthma, the factors that can increase its severity, and how to care for this disease.

To reach its audience, our educational program will rely on a unique "vehicle": a large, red, double-decked London Bus. This will be staffed by a full-time health educator, and will be equipped with a video-center and several interactive educational activities related to asthma. These interactive experiences will be centered on five cartoon characters exclusively created for this initiative by Joe DiDomenico of Thomas Jefferson University Graphics Department: The AsthmaBUSters©.

The cartoon characters "BUSters" are two schoolboys, two schoolgirls, and a hypoallergenic dog named "Trigger". The children are age-matched to our school audience and represent different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Some of these youngsters have asthma and some do not. In fact, each "BUSter" plays a different

role in our educational program Yet, they all serve as role models for children and as prompts to our three educational themes: Asthma Recognition; Asthma Care; and Asthma Success.

By making this program available to all school children (including non-asthmatics), their teachers and nurses, we hope to dispel any misunderstandings about asthma. By finding new ways to effectively educate youngsters and their families about this disease, we also hope to help those at risk, reduce the severity of their symptoms, and provide them with skills and tools which might serve them well for the rest of their lives.

For more information contact Sara LaPorte at 215-570-9120.

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About the Author

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