

Tulane University Program Trains Barbers to Snip Away Unhealthy Habits

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Can hair stylists and barbers improve their clients' health when they come in for a trim every month?

That's the question Tulane University public health researchers hope to answer with The Shop Talk Program, an initiative to train staff in 25 urban barbershops and beauty salons to talk to clients about eating habits, getting more exercise, managing their blood pressure and making other healthy choices. The Prevention Research Center, which is part of Tulane's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, has produced 2,600 copies of a 28-page, full-color *Feel Good Guide: How to Stay Healthy*. The book, which will be prominently displayed in 19 shops at the beginning of the program, explains how 10 small dietary and lifestyle changes can make a big difference in health.

"The *Feel Good Guide* focuses on the simple things we can all do to improve our health," says Lisa Hoffman, PRC communications and training coordinator. "It will also draw people's attention to symptoms that may be indicative of an unknown condition in which medical care is necessary."

The *Feel Good Guide* contains advice on: being more physically active, eating more fruits and vegetables, choosing low-salt foods, cutting back on junk food, managing diabetes, reducing alcohol intake, lowering blood pressure, quitting smoking, taking part in colon cancer screenings and practicing safe sex. It also contains healthy recipe cards, a directory of area free clinics as well as a Body Mass Index calculator to determine healthy weight ranges. A copy of the guide is available [here](#). Recipe cards can be downloaded [here](#).

PRC researchers have conducted baseline health surveys of patrons at participating barbershops and salons; they will return one month later to see if the program had

an impact on clients' attitudes and behaviors regarding health issues covered in the books. Six other salons that did not receive brochures will serve as a control group in the study to see how their patrons' survey responses compare to those in the program. Plans call for training stylists in those six barbershops and providing them with books at the conclusion of the program.

Participating shops are located in Algiers, the Central Business District, Central City, Gentilly, eastern New Orleans, Mid-City, as well as the 7th, 8th and 9th wards. The program is primarily aimed at reaching African-Americans, who are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. African-Americans are almost twice as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes as non-Hispanic whites. Although African-American adults are 40 percent more likely to have high blood pressure, they are 10 percent less likely than their non-Hispanic white counterparts to have their blood pressure under control, according to the U.S. Office of Minority Health.

The Shop Talk Program's primary goal is to evaluate whether patrons' attitudes or behaviors change after being exposed to culturally competent health behavior information. The PRC also hopes to expand upon existing research that suggest that barbershops and beauty salons are appropriate venues for distributing health information and generating conversations between stylists and patrons about health.

The study is expected to conclude by the fall.