

LIFE EDITOR: CAROL JANKOWSKI
894-2231 EXT. 2640
cjankowski@therecord.com

SECTION D

LIFE & health

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2003

ARTS — D3
Grammy nominees named
CLASSIFIED —
D8



MONDAYS: Learning • TUESDAYS: Life on the Run • WEDNESDAYS: Life at Home • THURSDAYS: Trends • FRIDAYS: Health



Dr. Daniela O'Neill (left) enjoys some books with Ariana Evans, 33 months and Lucas Cherkewski, 5, at the University of Waterloo.

RECORD STAFF

HEALTH CHECKS

ANTIDEPRESSANTS
Ontario study finds link to breast cancer

A new study of Ontario women suggests a modest link between certain antidepressants and breast cancer risk.

"With the increasing prevalence of certain antidepressants and the public health importance of breast cancer, even this small increase in risk indicated by our study is an important development which deserves further study," said lead researcher Nancy Kreiger of the preventive oncology division at Cancer Care Ontario.

The study is published in December's International Journal of Epidemiology. The findings were based on responses to a 21-page questionnaire mailed to women aged 25 to 74, asking them about past use of antidepressants and other risk factors for breast cancer.

More than 3,000 women diagnosed with breast cancer and about 3,000 healthy women were interviewed. Fourteen per cent of the breast cancer respondents had used antidepressants, compared to 12 per cent in the control group.

The study was funded by the Canadian Breast Cancer Research Alliance, which is supported in part by the Canadian Cancer Society.

ECHINACEA
Use among children can result in rashes

Echinacea failed to relieve children's cold symptoms and appeared to cause skin rashes in some cases, a study of 407 youngsters found.

It is one of the largest studies yet to question the benefits of the popular but unproven herbal remedy.

Echinacea is one of the most widely used herbal remedies in North America. Also known as the purple coneflower, echinacea is sold in a variety of over-the-counter preparations, including pills, drops and lozenges that are purported to boost the body's disease-fighting immune system.

"We did not find any group of children in whom echinacea appeared to have a positive benefit," said the researchers, led by Dr. James Taylor of the University of Washington's Child Health Institute.

Mild skin rashes occurred in seven per cent of colds treated with echinacea but in only 2.7 per cent of colds treated with a dummy preparation. The findings appeared in this week's Journal of the American Medical Association.

BYPASS SURGERY
Surgery leaves women with less quality of life

A study by Duke University Medical Center researchers has found that women have a worse quality of life than men after coronary artery bypass surgery.

Researchers speculate that either women might not experience the same level of physical benefits from the surgery as men, or their lowered quality of life is caused by factors other than the surgery.

"We know that in general women receiving bypass surgery are sicker, older, more likely to live alone and have other preoperative differences that would appear to explain a compromised quality of life," said lead author Dr. Barbara Phillips-Bute, assistant research professor of anesthesiology. "However, when we control for all these factors, a significant difference still exists."

• Record news services

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

When words come slowly

UW prof's questionnaire will help determine if child's language skills are on track

BY JOHANNA WEIDNER
RECORD STAFF

Parents worried about a child's ability to talk will be able to measure language development with a simple questionnaire now being honed by the University of Waterloo Centre for Child Studies.

Daniela O'Neill, an associate psychology professor, recently launched the last stage of developing the questionnaire that parents and health professionals will use to easily test the communication skills of children ages 18 months to four years.

The test can warn parents early about language delays, or soothe unfounded anxiety.

"This questionnaire is very badly needed," O'Neill said. "There's nothing that can be done quickly and on the spot."

O'Neill founded the child studies centre at UW in 1995, and the project began the next year when she drafted the first version of the questionnaire, called the Language Use Inventory.

What followed was years of testing the questionnaire on more than 600 parents, many

from Waterloo Region, to whittle it down to the final version.

As now formulated, the questionnaire should take a parent about half an hour to complete. It asks questions about a child's everyday communication, ranging from his questions and comments about things to the ability to talk about daily activities.

O'Neill's now calling for 3,000 parents from the area and across Canada to complete the questionnaire by the end of next year.

AGES 18 TO 47 MONTHS

All the answers will be compiled to find normal levels of language development for every month in the development of children between 18 and 47 months.

"Children's language develops so quickly that we really have to move month by month," O'Neill said.

Those average scores then can be compared with a child's performance on the questionnaire to find out if he or she is progressing normally, compared to peers, or if there are delays.

She expects the questionnaire

to be used by teachers, family doctors and speech and language professionals, as well as parents.

The quick test can offer great relief to parents, O'Neill said.

The first step available now is a visit to a family doctor for advice, but that's not always reassuring or helpful because kids are often quiet or on their best behaviour in a doctor's office.

"Sometimes the parents find the (doctor's) answers frustrating," O'Neill said.

The waiting list for a professional assessment and treatment at places like the KidsAbility Centre for Child Development in Waterloo is months long, she said.

During that time, parents get more anxious and, if there is a problem, the kids lose precious time. If they can afford it, frustrated parents sometimes pay out of pocket for a private assessment so they can get immediate results.

Ensuring their kids are on track in developing language is of vital interest to Waterloo parents Rita and Ron Cherkewski, who filled out the questionnaire for Lucas, 5, and Charlotte, 2.

Rita works in the UW psychology department and was eager to volunteer for O'Neill's project because she thinks the questionnaire will be a great resource for parents.

"This is a tool you can use yourself," Cherkewski said.

Early language development

PARTICIPANTS SOUGHT

• Parents of children aged 1 1/2 to four are invited to fill out the Language Use Inventory questionnaire for the UW Centre for Child Studies.

• Families from across Canada can participate.

The questionnaire takes about 30 minutes and is done by mail. Kids who participate get a T-shirt with the project logo.

• For more information, call 888-4821 or 1-866-994-0833 toll-free, or go to

www.childstudies.uwaterloo.ca.

The study, called the Canadian Early Childhood Language Project, is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

is crucial to a child's education and life, O'Neill said.

"It's through language that we come to learn about the world, share our enjoyment of the world and plan our future adventures in the world," she said.

jweidner@therecord.com



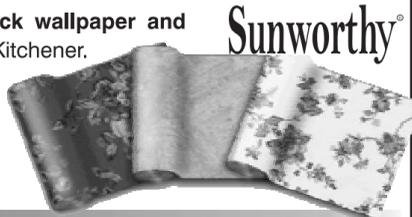
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