

A prescription for a full stomach

Burke pediatricians connect food insecure patients with a nearby food bank.

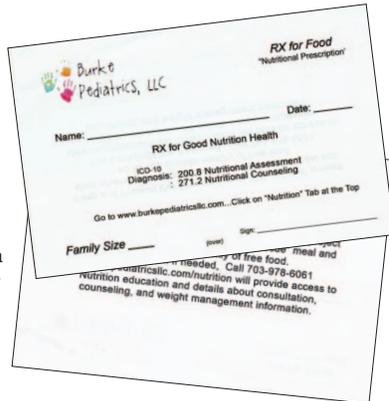
By ZOEY MARAIST
Catholic Herald Staff Writer

If a doctor offers a solution to a problem, there's a good chance the patient will listen. That's the logic behind RX for Food, a program that identifies families who are food insecure and directs them to Food for Others, a Fairfax-based food bank.

"As a mom, when I go to the doctor, I listen to everything they say because I want what's best for my children," said Annie Turner, executive director of Food for Others. "So if my doctor gives me a prescription for my child, I will take it immediately and fill it so that my child can be well."

Dr. Fred Garner, a physician at Burke Pediatrics, Turner and their colleagues came up with the idea for RX for Food while at a local conference. The story was originally reported by WUSA9.

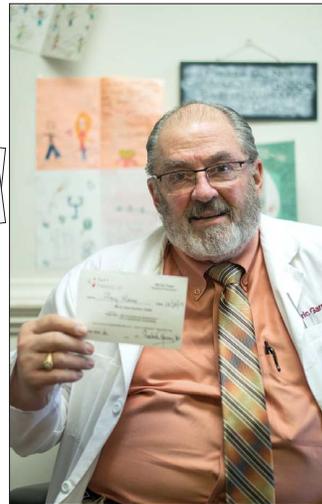
"(Garner) was talking about how he wanted to feed children over the summer and I thought, I've got a whole warehouse of food, how can we make this work?" said Turner, a parishioner of St. James Church in Falls Church, where



turns for food to be filled at Food for Others. During the summer, needy patients could get food once a week, and during the school year, once a month.

Of the 2,000 families they surveyed, around 200 were food insecure, said Garner, which means they may worry where their next meal is coming from, or not have enough money to buy more food. A quarter of Garner's patients are on Medicaid, while the rest have insurance. But when they administered the survey, the pediatricians found that it wasn't only those on Medicaid who were going hungry — 25 percent of the food insecure patients had insurance.

"It was a big surprise to find that many people who were not obviously



ZOEY MARAIST | CATHOLIC HERALD
Dr. Fred Garner, a physician at Burke Pediatrics, holds an RX for Food prescription, which he writes for food insecure patients to take to a local food bank.

may not be aware of the social services available to them. So he's speaking with other doctors about how to implement

Find out more

To learn more about the program or to start a RX for Food at your medical practice, go to rxforfood.com or call Burke Pediatrics at 703/978-6061.

the RX for Food program in their own practices. He also has worked with the Capital Area Food Bank, a warehouse that supplies food to local food banks, to increase the number of participating food banks.

"Next year, they will have 13 sites throughout Fairfax County, which will honor these prescriptions, and we're out recruiting physicians," said Garner.

Having pediatricians screen their patients for food insecurity is important because it gets families food, said Turner. "We know the effects that food insecurity can have on children," she said. "It's important that someone with that type of influence on a family is really looking at food insecurity and doing something about it."

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Annie Turner, executive director of Food for Others, and Robert Lewis, an employee, work in the food bank's warehouse in Fairfax.

she originally started volunteering with Food for Others. St. James also has its own food distribution program, as do many parishes that run programs or work with diocesan Catholic Charities St. Lucy Project.

Garner and other physicians at his practice couldn't access the names of children who received free and reduced lunch at schools. So they incorporated questions into a nutrition survey to help identify patients who frequently went hungry. "Our focus was, when school isn't there, what do these families (on free and reduced lunches) do?" asked Garner. They then could write prescrip-

economically challenged," said Garner. Some families who filled the prescription had never gone to a food bank before and knew nothing about the resources they could access.

The doctors learned two important things from the program, said Garner. "You can't identify somebody who is food insecure by the information we traditionally have," he said. "Many people who need food or would benefit from additional food aren't aware that this county is abundantly supplied with free food resources."

Garner believes doctors have a unique opportunity to help families who

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