

Virtual Early Education Center (VEEC): Room by Room Practices for Health and Safety

April Williams: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Webinar Virtual Early Education Center: Room by Room Practices for Health and Safety. My name is April Williams, and I'm a program manager within the National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness at the American Academy of Pediatrics. I'm so excited to be with you this afternoon to share with you this amazing new tool that I'm sure will be so useful to all of you in your work.

Before we begin the presentation, I have some housekeeping items. First, all participants will be muted throughout the entire webinar. And this webinar is being recorded in an archived version along with the slides, will be available to you on the health portal of the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, or ECLKC, for later viewing. If you need technical assistance at any time during the webinar, ask for help in the "Ask A Question" box on the left-hand side of your screen.

There will not be a certificate or survey at the end of this webinar. So for today's webinar, we have three amazing expert speakers. First, Linda Smith. Linda Smith is the deputy assistant secretary for Early Childhood Development for the Administration for Children and Families at the US Department of Health and Human Services. In this role, she provides overall policy coordination for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs and the Child Care and Development Fund, as well as serving as the liaison with the US Department of Education and other federal agencies.

Her office serves as the focal point for the Early Childhood Policy at the Federal level. Linda Smith previously served as the executive director for the National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agencies, or NACRRA, where she represented more than 650 community-based agencies concerned with the care of children in the earliest years. Prior to joining NACRRA, Linda Smith served as the legislative fellow and professional staffer on the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee under the chairmanship of the late Senator, Edward M. Kennedy.

Prior to this work, she was the director of the Office of Family Policy for the Secretary of Defense, where she was one of the primary architects of the military's child care program. Additionally, Linda Smith has held positions with both the United States Army and the United States Air Force. She began her career in early childhood education at the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in her native state of Montana. And she is a graduate of the University of Montana.

Our second speaker is Dr. Fan Tait. Dr. Tait is a pediatric neurologist and associate executive director and department – excuse me – and director of the Department of Child Health and Wellness for the American Academy of Pediatrics. For many years, she has led child family pediatric and interdisciplinary initiatives at the state, national, and federal levels. Her passion, advocacy, and expertise in medical home implementation and family-centered engagement and partnership began at the state and federal levels over 20 years ago.

Dr. Tait has insight of many of the academy's strategic priorities, including Bright Futures, the National and International Guide for Well Child Care from Birth to 21. She leads the National Center for Medical Home Implementation and the recently awarded National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness, which addresses health and wellness and Head Start, child care, and home visiting.

Examples of other initiatives under her direction include early brain and childhood development, the Institute for Healthy Childhood Weight, mental health, foster care, injury and violence prevention, and disaster preparedness. She is also leading the academy's development of a National Center on Healthy and Resilient Children.

And our final speaker is Kelly Towey. For over 20 years, Kelly Towey has worked at the national and local level as an educator, writer, researcher, communication specialist, health policy analyst, and project manager. Miss Towey has worked for national medical organizations and other associations working on a variety of education and professional issues and health care related topics, including health policy, geriatric health, and child and adolescent health.

She has been once the Head Start National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness for the past four years. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with a bachelor's degree in childhood and family studies, a master's of education degree from Loyola University, Chicago, and a certificate in project management from Loyola University in Chicago. And with that, I invite Linda Smith to begin.

Linda Smith: Well, thank you, April, for the introduction. And I just can't tell you how thrilled I am, especially to join some of my colleagues here. Fan and I go back quite a ways and have been very interested and excited in this. And I also feel before I get started that I need to give a shout out to the staff here at ACF and Marco Belton in particular, who has spent a lot of time on this particular effort. He's here in the room with me. And it's a labor of love for him. I know that.

Before we go into anything, I wanted to just go back to the slide previously and note that down in that corner of that slide, there's a slogan that says, "School readiness begins with health." And I have to tell you that I believe that wholeheartedly. It's been sort of the emphasis of my career since almost day one in working on this.

As many of you, I started out working in an early childhood program, first on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation as was said, and then moving on to the military and actually running the military program. I want to share a kind of a shady past story of my own that highlights, I think, why I got interested in the whole issue of health in particular in child care.

I'm going to date myself on this one as well, because dating back to the late '70s when I was working for the airport, I happened to be on an Air Force base that had a hepatitis outbreak. And it was one in Arizona where there were three bases that had this particular problem, and it was quite affecting the flight line.

So The Center for Disease Control came out in, I think it was 1979 maybe, and started to look at child care on military bases trying to figure out what was the link. How was hepatitis spreading on the base? And they actually did track it back to child care.

And that was very startling to me because I thought I ran a pretty clean operation. But what we found was it was tied to the diaper changing area in the baby room. And it was very startling to all of us. We were quarantined. We went through a long period of training et cetera, et cetera.

But at that point in time people didn't understand the basic hand washing, and how diseases were spread from an infant to an adult without a symptom being trans – you couldn't see the symptoms in the child, though you saw them in the adult. And it really was a wake-up call to me. And ever since that experience, this has been something that I have said in that going back to that line, is that that quality begins with the health and safety of children.

So we cannot overestimate the importance of this. And we still to this day have challenges in that regard. As I moved on to the National Association for Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies. Many of you know the work that we did there with the basic in trying to hold state's accountable for basic health and safety standards, and putting out there when states weren't doing things, like basic hand washing as a part of their training, and what they were doing to introduce folks to child care.

So in so many ways, these things have been a part of my work at every juncture from the reservation, to the military, to my work in the national scene. So where are we today? Well, today I'm in another good position here in the job that I have is overseeing both Head Start, Early Head Start, and child care programs to once again call attention to this. And when I first got here, we started out on this and looking at how can we really begin to improve and put a foundation under our program for basic health and safety.

So what we did several years ago was begin to look at, if we were going to help guide the states in terms of how they would approach this whole effort, what could we do to create commonality between Head Start, Early Head Start, childcare, pre-K, and these programs? Where was the common basis for fully implementing good health and safety practices?

So we started looking at the basics. And now, as you see, they were published in 2015. And they are a series of what we consider to be the very minimal standard for what an early childhood program should be subscribing to when it comes to basic in health and safety. They're voluntary. But they do provide that guidance that we hope that in the future, as states continue to look at their regulations and their standards, that they look at these standards as something that they can align to.

We have certainly done that here at the federal level as we have approached both the Head Start Performance Standards, and the New Child Care and Development Block Grant implementation. We have looked very carefully about how we begin to create that base with these caring for children basics. So they're very important to us, to me personally. And we hope that everyone out there takes a really good look at those.

But continuing on with the effort, we then moved on with how do we really create this common base between Head Start and child care? It led us to the work we've done with the Head Start, Early Head Start childcare partnership. And they have continued this effort to align health and safety, began with health and safety requirements, and how we implement those, and how we begin to build these up these comprehensive services that look at all of these needs for health, nutrition, social services, and other things that the family needs assessment might show.

So we've continued this work, building on health on that health and safety bottom line. And then the next step we took was looking at the alignment of our training and technical assistance. When we first started looking at this, we had a health center in Head Start and a health center in child care.

We really felt pretty strongly here that we needed to combine these efforts, make what resources Head Start had available to the rest of the system and vice versa, that health is health, is health, and children are no less healthy or safe no matter-- or should be no less healthy or safe no matter where they are. So our technical assistance has been redesigned. And we are now in the process of fully implementing that, the TA to ensure that we're offering the highest quality assistance we can to states, and programs, and child care providers across this country, making sure that anything produced with federal funds is publicly available to anyone who needs it and can use it.

So that brings us to our next big step forward, which is a really exciting thing that I'm sure you're here to see today. And that is what we lovingly called the VEEC. It's the Virtual Early Education Center. It was designed with all of you in mind out there, because it's envisioned that this will provide you with a place you can go that resembles a classroom that you can manipulate and find answers to problems that you may have in your classroom or on your playground.

So as you go through this and you see this demonstrated, if you are looking for something on medication administration, let's say, and you look at that, it will give you what you need to know about that, both through the Caring For Our Children Basics, for Head Start Performance Standards, for child care rules that may we may be publishing and so forth. So it will look by the different rooms in a program starting with the director's office and the staff rooms, moving through the kitchen and on into the classroom. And it will help you find resources that will answer questions and give you things that will help you improve your program.

So it will – basically, as I said, it links back to a variety of things. And you're going to see that demonstrated here. But I think what I can only say is that I've been watching this evolve. And it's so exciting. And I'm so proud, actually, to sit here with the folks in this room today and acknowledge their work and the work of the American Academy of Pediatrics and development of this tool.

We hope that you find it useful. We're open to hearing what would help make it more useful to you. I'm looking at Marco. And I know we both had hoped that we'd have the Avatar. But we don't. But it's something down the road that we can keep thinking of, is could we do that piece.

So I'm right now thrilled to turn this over to Fan because I know Fan is every bit as supportive of early childhood health and development and we are here at The Administration for Children and Families. So Fan, it's over to you.

Dr. Fan Tait: Okay. Thank you so much, Linda. And absolutely, what you said is absolutely correct. As you know, I'm Fan Tait. And today, I'm representing the American Academy of Pediatrics.

And I'm so pleased to be on this webinar. It's really a remarkable privilege to be here today with you, Linda, with all of our federal colleagues involved with this project, but particularly to be with all of you who are on this webinar, because I know that you work so very hard every single day on behalf of children and families.

And that's what we do here at the American Academy of Pediatrics too. So together, we really make a difference in the lives of children and families. Let me tell you just a little bit about the AAP. It's an organization of 64,000 pediatric providers, most of whom are physicians, that are dedicated to the

health, safety, and well-being of children. Sounds a lot like what you're doing, right? So it really fits with what we are working together on.

So within the Academy, we have a Department of Child Health and Wellness. And it houses many of the initiatives including the federally funded National Center on Early Childhood Health and Wellness. That serves as a TA center for Head Start and child care professionals and families.

The AAP is also home to a lot of other initiatives, some of them you will have heard about, I hope-- some you may not. But we key off of those initiatives also in the work that we're doing with Head Start, and child care, and home visiting. So if you look at these different initiatives that are listed here, I would say that not only do we have these initiatives, such as Bright Futures and the Medical Home, but it also includes many of our different groups here at the Academy.

So we have-- doesn't matter what the names are-- but committees, and councils, and sections, that address topics, such as early childhood development, early care and education. You heard Linda talk about infectious diseases, safety and injury prevention, and other health and safety topics. So as I said earlier, I'm just delighted to be here today.

I'm so excited about the VEEC. That's what we call it. And you heard Linda say, the Virtual Early Childhood Early Education Center. The AAP has fortunately had a long history of working on early care and education issues.

For about 20 years here at the Academy we actually housed the former Healthy Child Care America Program and worked to create resources and strategies to support the healthy and safe development of children in early care and education settings. So about five years ago, we couldn't have been more excited to become the home of the Head Start National Center on health, and again, work collaboratively with our federal partners to do what has already been described.

The next slide just shows – as you all do, we work with other partners. And previously and ongoing we've worked with McNeil Consumer Healthcare. And we worked with them on a project that's called Healthy Futures. And that Healthy Futures was Healthy Futures, improving health outcomes for young children. And that's when we started thinking about the VEEC.

But then we moved into action here. And so the VEEC was born through a collaboration of the initiatives that you've already heard about. So our intention was to create a very realistic looking early education center that you can explore room by room, layer by layer, and you can find resources that you really can intuitively find resources that you need.

In the past, we've had list after list-- at least at the Academy, we've had list after list of resources. And you had to look for those links. You had to hunt and find them. But what we're looking at with the VEEC is really, hopefully you will find that this is very intuitive. You have a need, you can go right there and find the information you need.

And it will include-- it does include resources like the Head Start Program Performance Standards and Caring For Our Children Standards, many, many other resources that come from other national organizations, the AAP, and certainly federal agencies. And it's provided in each one of these rooms. OK.

So the VEEC addresses many important topics. We said things like managing infectious diseases. Linda mentioned medication administration. I'm just listing a few more-- healthy, active living, the information on safety and injury prevention. And then I really wanted to highlight information on the importance of staff wellness.

I think as we are looking at the Academy. Are with all the incredible work that you do every single day. I think we all have to have to be well to take care of children and families. And so I hope that you will enjoy the information and use the information, particularly our staff wellness because we all need that. Like Linda said, and like all our partners, we know that school reading begins with health.

You know that if you're not healthy, you can't learn. And we hope that the VEEC helps you and your role as the promoting health, so the physical, developmental, mental, social, emotional, health and safety, so that all children are healthy and ready to learn.

So thank you for letting me spend just a few minutes with you, Linda too, setting this up. And now I'll turn it over to Kelly Towey. You heard in the introduction about Kelly from our National Center, who will give you just a brief overview.

So this is just getting you to get there and really take a hard look at it-- but an overview of the basics on how to use VEEC. We so hope that this will be a resource that will be very helpful to you on a daily basis. Kelly?

Kelly Towey: Thank you, Dr. Tait. And hello. I'm pleased to provide you, as Dr. Tait said, with a short overview of the VEEC website and some of its functionality. And I want to just tell you a bit what you'll find when you log onto the website. As mentioned earlier, the VEEC serves young children from infancy to school age. And it provides a variety of areas the visitor might see in a Head Start or child care center.

So looking at this screenshot, you might be thinking, well, this doesn't look anything like my center or program. However, whether your program or center resides in a school, a church, or standalone building, you will find common elements within each room that childcare and Head Start programs have. But the first thing you should do when you get started with the VEEC is register. And registering is important because it activates the functionality of the website so that you can go to each of the areas in the VEEC.

And to register, you click on Register on the upper right-hand corner of the website. And I have a little arrow there shown on the screen. And once you've registered, you'll be able to start exploring the website.

April: Hey, Kelly?

Kelly: Yes?

April: Can you get a little closer to your phone and speak up? I just want to make sure everyone can hear all the information you're giving.

Kelly: Okay. When you return to the VEEC, you can either go to the login area and enter your email address to sign in again, or you can check the Save Signed Inbox back so that you do not get to sign in each time you visit the VEEC.

And one of the great features about the VEEC, is when you come back to the website and log in, it will take you to the last place that you visited. As mentioned earlier, there are many topic areas available for you to explore, things like managing infectious diseases, staff wellness, medication administration, and healthy, active living. And you select one of these topics by clicking on Explore More, where the orange arrow is on the top of the screen here.

And in this example on the screen, I've chosen the topic of Managing Infectious Diseases. And then I clicked on the preschool room to explore. And moving your mouse around the screen will light up the different rooms. And then when you click on one of those rooms, it'll bring you to that room.

So here I clicked on the preschool room. And I selected Preschool Room Play Area A. And once you select a room, you can visit the hot spots for this room in two different ways. You can select a hotspot from the list at the bottom where the orange arrow is pointing, or you can move your cursor within the room itself, and hot spots will light up as indicated by arrow there.

You'll see the name of the hotspot in the blue. This one is the pillow and mat, pillow and mat. So then you can see where the orange arrow is. That area is also highlighted as well with red.

And then once you click on the hotspot, you will see a rationale for the hotspot, as well as the Caring For Our Children's Standards, and the Head Start Program Performance Standards, and also the related resources. And then clicking on one of these categories, you will be shown the standards or resources.

And here's an example of what appeared when I clicked on the Head Start Program Performance Standards for this hotspot. And then when you click on the Caring For Our Children Standards – Caring For Our Children's Basics, as mentioned earlier, are indicated by an asterisk appearing after the standards, such as the Caring For Our Children's Standard here, routine cleaning, sanitizing, and disinfecting, which is standard 3.3, 0.1, as I am showing you on this screenshot.

And at the start of this webinar, it was mentioned that the VEEC has classrooms for children from infancy to school age. And here is one of infant's rooms, the diaper changing room. And here I just wanted to take a moment to point out the details and elements that are in each of these rooms, things like the locks on the cabinets that should have locks, hand washing posters, waste cans, et cetera.

In fact, all of the items listed in the gray area on this screenshot are hotspots and items you can click on. So even if your space doesn't look like the VEEC, you will certainly find common elements in each of the spaces where you work. Here is one of the school age rooms. And again, there's a lot of detail.

There's things like posters, games, books you may recognize. And then here is the staff room. And if you haven't noticed from other screenshots, you might see some familiar items, as we do get real items in the room. For example, the stress posters that are on the wall here are posters that are available on the ECLKC websites. And the images on a bulletin board are actual news letters that you can download from the ECLKC website as well.

So you might be wondering, well, how do you move to a different room once you've been in a room? Well, once you've explored a room and you're ready to move to another room, you can use a pop-up menu at the bottom right of the room that I showed you earlier.

And you just use that little green arrow to see all the room titles. And clicking on a title will bring you to that room. Or, you can use the Home button at the bottom of the screen and click on the VEEC icon image to return to the home page. And that will show you all the room again. Please note that in terms of functionality, using the Back button on your web browser does not bring you back to a room. So use one of the three options here.

And then to find information on safety and injury prevention, you click on Safety and Injury Prevention where that orange arrow is on this screen, and this area will provide you with resources to find out more about safety and injury prevention in early childhood centers. And this includes information on transportation safety as well as [Inaudible].

And here's a look at some the resources that are available for safety and injury prevention. And you can easily get to these resources from any place on the website as the link appears no matter where you are in the VEEC. And then here is a screenshot of where the VEEC is located on ECLKC along with the URL. And you'll notice that the site also includes an instructional video. And this goes into a little bit more detail than we've given here today, as well as a listing of some frequently asked questions.

And then as our speakers have mentioned, there are many people that have been part of the VEEC and its development. And we just want to take a moment here to acknowledge some of those here on this screen. And then if you still have questions, we have created, as I mentioned just a bit ago, a frequently asked questions section on the website that should answer many of the most common questions you may have.

You can also e-mail us at health@ecetta.info, or call us at 888-227-5125 with your questions. And we really hope you will take some time to explore the VEEC. We think it's a really exciting, new tool for everyone to use.

April: Great. Thank you so much, Kelly. Thank you. Thank you, everyone. So that concludes the presentation portion of the webinar. And I'd like to, again, thank Linda Smith, Dr. Tait, and Kelly for taking the time to share this great tool with us.

And just a reminder to everyone that the Virtual Early Education Center is now live on the ECLKC. And I'll go back to the link. But I just want everyone to know that we will follow up the webinar with an e-mail with the exact link so you can get to it.

So please be on the lookout for the e-mail, and take some time to explore the tool. So that concludes our webinar. We'll be in touch. And thank you for participating.

[End video]