

## Raising healthy readers

### Through program, doctor cultivates literacy among the youngest of minds

By Kristen Roderick - The Hutchinson News - [kroderick@hutchnews.com](mailto:kroderick@hutchnews.com)

When Dr. Ellen Losew was a child, she enjoyed curling up to a good book.

It gave her a chance to broaden her mind and use her imagination.

Now, she and other physicians across the state want to give children that same opportunity.

Each patient who has a well-child checkup between 6 months and 5 years old will receive a book through the "Turn a Page. Touch a Mind." literacy campaign sponsored by the Kansas chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Kansas Pediatric Foundation.

"We're very excited to be able to provide the kids with this type of service," said Losew, a pediatrician at The Medical Center.

The campaign is based on the national Reach Out and Read program, but legislative funding created a setback, said Beth Shearer, director of development. Still, local organizers decided to fund the program through grants and donations.

"If you look at the state of Kansas, most children are seen in private physician offices, and they couldn't always afford to buy books for the Reach Out and Read program," Shearer said. "The program basically raises the money so we can buy the books for the physicians to hand out at their sites."

Donors have helped the Kansas Pediatric Foundation raise more than \$1 million, and a grant from the Kansas Health Foundation locked in another \$1 million, according to a release by the Kansas Pediatric Foundation. The money creates an endowment fund to purchase books for about 20 sites across the state. Physicians expect to distribute more than 30,000 books per year.

Shearer said between 2003 and June 2007, 46,500 books have been distributed. July through December numbers should show another 10,000 given away.

Losew said she plans to hand out 3,000 to 5,000 books in Hutchinson this year. She hopes that instead of fearing needles when they enter the doctor's office, children will get excited about books.

"This is a nice plus," she said.

The program gives Losew an opportunity to show she's interested in more than just a child's physical health, she said. She wants to help assist in a child's language skills and help parents become involved in teaching their children to read.

"Studies show that parents who read to their children help introduce a love of reading at an early age," she said. "It will increase overall literacy and, of course, overall language and development."

Other doctors who have the program include Dr. Charlotte Olson Seago in Liberal, Dr. Michael Shull and Dr. Stephen Myers in Garden City and Dr. Jonathan Jantz in Newton. The program is in its infancy in Hutchinson, but Losew said she thinks it will continue to grow.

"I hope we can continue it for many years to come," she said.

While the program is geared toward raising money to purchase books for children, Losew said The Medical

Center will accept used books too.

"The goal is to increase the reading of books even in the waiting areas and lobbies," she said. "I like to see that much more than the television blaring. We're trying to get used-book libraries in our waiting rooms."

Interested?

To donate to the "Turn a Page. Touch a Mind." literacy campaign, visit [www.kansaspediatricfoundation.org](http://www.kansaspediatricfoundation.org).