

Graphic novel aims to help teens and parents understand eating disorders



By Brock Weir

If Dr. Ahmed Boachie had his way, it would be given to parents as soon as they found out they were expecting. In the meantime, however, he and the team at Southlake Regional Health Centre's Eating Disorders Program are looking to guide families through the challenge in a new and creative way.

On Monday, Dr. Boachie helped launch *Don't Wait! A Guided Program for Teens with Eating Disorders*.

A graphic novel, it incorporates the hallmarks of Southlake's eight week eating disorders program for children and adolescents, but is updated, refreshed and looking to take on stigma and misconceptions.

"It's obviously easy to read, it catches the eye, and it's easy to understand what can be done with the new illustrations," says Dr. Boachie.

But, it is so much more.

According to Jill Fraleigh, one of the authors of *Don't Wait*, when the original program was first developed, evidence-based data on how to treat people living with eating disorders was scant. That data, however, is now at hand and it was a matter of looking at ways to incorporate that evidence into the program and bring information up to date.

"Eating disorders are so unique that in every program we have something different," says Dr. Boachie. "Families play a key role in getting young people well. If I had my own way, the book would be sold all over the place once people became pregnant."

From their perspective, parents and families are on the frontlines of first identifying whether their child or teen might be living with an eating disorder but can often be harbouring misconceptions about the issue, including the belief that they might be at the root cause of it.

"One of the misconceptions some parents believe [is] they cause eating disorders, suddenly it is about eating," says Dr. Boachie.

"Nobody causes eating disorders. It has been proven time and again. It's a very strange illness. It doesn't matter the position you are in the family, middle child, first child, age ? it doesn't matter."

Adds Ms. Fraleigh: "We don't know what causes eating disorders, but we know families have a really important role in terms of recovery. Families don't cause eating disorders, but families are vital in terms of recovery. If families don't get involved, it is really hard for kids to get better."