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Just what doctor ordered

Course teaches healthy cooking to medical students

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By Nancy Buczek
Staff writer

A group of medical students donned chef hats and aprons Sunday to learn the basics behind preparing a healthy, good-tasting meal.

"I don't think you can eat healthy until you know how to cook," said Dr. Michael Roizen, a professor of anesthesiology at SUNY Upstate Medical University.

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Fifteen students are in an intensive 10-day, two-credit elective offered for the first time to Upstate's third- and fourth-year College of Medicine students.

Each of the 10-hour sessions will teach the students a range of skills that will be useful in their own kitchens as well as teach them nutritional information that as future physicians they will need to know - such as issues surrounding obesity and arthritis.

"Thirty to 40 percent of chronic disease could be managed through better nutrition," Roizen said. Some of the course focuses on the RealAge diet, developed by Roizen in 1999. Roizen says people can reduce their "real age" (versus chronological age) by adopting healthy behaviors and avoiding unhealthy ones.

Roizen wrote his "RealAge Diet" book with Dr. John La Puma. Roizen and La Puma have a new book to be published June 3, called "Cooking the RealAge Way."

Each of the students in the course will receive a copy of Roizen and La Puma's newest book, meat thermometers and a chef's knife. Roizen said he paid for the materials, as well as the food used during the course, and P&C donated the kitchen space in the deli area of its Fayetteville supermarket. Upstate paid for La Puma to come to Syracuse from Santa Barbara, Calif., to help run this week's course, Roizen said.

La Puma, who specializes in internal medicine, also trained as a chef and cooked once a week for almost four years at Chicago's Frontera Grill/Topolobampo.

Sunday he spent about two hours working with the students, giving them tips on the proper way to hold a knife and showing them how to best cut onions, carrots and potatoes.

Roizen worked alongside a group of students while La Puma walked the kitchen space, inspecting the students' techniques and giving pointers.

"Excellent ... Slow over there," he called out to various students as he scanned the room.

As Marc Efron sliced a potato, La Puma stopped to correct his slicing motion.

"You're pulling back and I'm pushing forward," La Puma said.

Efron, a fourth-year medical student from Long Island, said he enrolled in the course because he wanted to learn more about cooking. Usually he makes tuna fish or microwave pizzas.

Students will learn how to prepare meals by methods such as sauteing, broiling and grilling.

Shannon Brown, a fourth-year medical student from Skaneateles, said she wasn't daunted by the amount of time the course requires because she was looking forward to learning different cooking techniques. "I want to cook nutritionally but have food taste good," she said.

Roizen said that when he was dean of Upstate's medical school he would often have meals with students and observe what they ordered.

"It was so unhealthy," Roizen said. "For me, this is a total experiment. Can you teach this to medical students and can we do it in a way that works. ... We'll watch what they eat for snacks by the end of the week."

John La Puma, MD, FACP

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Dr. La Puma is the author of the New York Times Bestseller "[The RealAge Diet: Make Yourself Younger with What You Eat!](#)" (4/2001) and "Cooking the RealAge

Way: 80 Recipes That Turn Back Your Biological Clock!" (6/2003). Both are published by Cliff Street/Harper Collins, and co-authored with Dr. Michael Roizen.