Child abuse is a serious and prevalent public health problem throughout the United States including Alabama. In 2015 there were 21,722 reports made to the Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) involving 30,647 children. After investigation, 8,466 children were determined to be child abuse victims. With an overall population of just over 4.8 million and 1.1 million children under 18, this amounted to nearly 3% of Alabama’s children being involved in investigations and 1% determined to be victims of child abuse for that year. Child abuse is divided into four categories: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, & psychological (emotional) abuse. The health consequences for abused children are substantial, including short term risks such as physical injuries (fractures, bruising, lacerations, abdominal injury, head trauma), sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy, mental health problems (anxiety, fear, depression), and death. In 2015, there were 1,670 deaths due to child abuse in the US, 13 of those deaths occurred in Alabama. The long term consequences of child abuse in adults include significant increases in substance abuse, depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and premature mortality. The financial cost to society is substantial, estimated at $2.3 billion annually (2013 dollars) in Alabama alone.

Every April, the Children's Bureau of the US Dept. of Health & Human Services observes National Child Abuse Prevention Month “to raise public awareness of child abuse and neglect, recommit efforts and resources aimed at protecting children and strengthening families, and promote community involvement through activities that support the cause.” Children’s of Alabama and the CHIPS Center stay busy all month in an effort to increase awareness of this common and serious public health problem affecting all aspects of society, but most especially, our children. Some of the many activities planned for the month include: decorating the hospital, handing out posters to local school systems, participating in Child Fun Day, and cosponsoring the International Assn of Forensic Nurses-Alabama Chapter annual conference. For more information on National Child Abuse Prevention Month, visit the National Child Abuse Prevention Month website at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/preventionmonth/.

References:

Michael A. Taylor, MD
4/10/2017