



*Tonya Johnson and Gloria Richard-Davis, M.D., participate in a culinary medicine event.*

## Culinary Medicine Blends Art and Science

By Katrina Dupins

**I**nside a test kitchen in Little Rock, medical students taste a healthy and affordable meal they prepared as part of a pilot instruction course for the soon-to-be fully functioning culinary medicine program at UAMS.

In summer 2018, Gina Drobena, M.D., and Gloria Richard-Davis, M.D., started a working group to explore how UAMS could start teaching its students how to use food as medicine.



They're learning how practical and inexpensive cooking healthy meals can be. If it's part of their lives, it'll come naturally for them to talk to their patients about it."

Stephanie Gardner, Pharm.D., Ed.D., provost and chief strategy officer, is leading the effort. She is excited about the opportunity and potential for the program.

"We see this as a terrific opportunity for students across all health professions," Gardner said.

UAMS has adopted the pioneering culinary medicine curriculum created by Timothy Harlan, M.D., executive director of the Goldring Center for Culinary Medicine at Tulane University. The Goldring Center, which opened in 2013, is the first culinary medicine center in a U.S. medical school. Since then, several schools across the country have adopted Tulane's curriculum, each slightly adapting the flavor to work for them.

Tonya Johnson is a certified nutrition support dietitian at UAMS and director of nutrition services. She sifts through curriculum-approved recipes and obtains the ingredients needed to teach the students in the pilot course.

"I try to look for recipes that people in our area would eat and enjoy," Johnson said. "I also look at the prices of the ingredients to make sure it's something within the budget of an average patient."

The classes last about 90 minutes, Johnson said. She begins the first class with instruction of cooking basics like knife skills, roasting, basting and sautéing. Then they move on to food preparation. Students do everything from scratch.

"Once we've cooked the meal, we show them how to plate it," Johnson said. "Portion size was one thing that was eye opening for many students."

One trick Johnson showed them in presenting the food is to slice the meat and flare it over the plate.

"That gives the appearance that there's more meat. But it's really the proper portion size of 3-4 ounces."

Once the students taste their creation, they discuss how to apply their learning to patient care.

"There is benefit for the students as well," said Richard-Davis, program director for culinary

medicine and an infertility and reproductive endocrinology specialist. "They're learning how practical and inexpensive cooking healthy meals can be. If it's part of their lives, it'll come naturally for them to talk to their patients about it."

In addition to the College of Medicine curriculum, UAMS is working to integrate culinary medicine into the interprofessional education (IPE) curriculum, continuing education, community engagement, and scholarship and research.

In October 2018, the IPE committee hosted a student cooking challenge as part of a case study involving federal SNAP benefits that provide nutrition to families in need.

In April 2019, UAMS hosted a cooking demonstration for patients with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PSOS). Women with PSOS have a hormonal imbalance and metabolic problems. It's a common and treatable cause for infertility and can be helped by lifestyle changes like a more healthy diet.

Gardner hopes the culinary medicine program will grow into a larger focus that will change the way all health care professionals talk to patients about food and healthy eating, including the food pantry UAMS opened recently.

"It would be nice for the food pantry to serve healthy foods along with recipes to demonstrate to recipients healthy and inexpensive ways to prepare the food," Gardner said.

In March, UAMS Chancellor Cam Patterson, M.D., MBA, awarded the culinary medicine program and food pantry \$100,000 to adapt a culinary medicine curriculum for UAMS students and to develop an in-house food pantry for employees and students who struggle with food insecurity.

"We hope the food pantry not only helps us address food insecurity but that much like the culinary medicine curriculum, it promotes healthier food choices with easy-to-prepare recipes," Gardner said. 🍴