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### **Kids and the Effects of Obesity on the Musculoskeletal System**

Rosemont, IL - October 19, 2011 – A global epidemic of childhood obesity can have a devastating impact on a child's musculoskeletal system, the U.S. Bone and Joint Initiative says. Because healthy bones and joints are the building blocks of a healthy body, when extra weight stresses growing bones it can cause pain and interfere with normal childhood growth and development.

#### **Growth Plate Problem Linked to Childhood Obesity**

Jesus Retana of Los Angeles, California was a heavy child even as a 6 year old. He has always been pretty active but he eats a lot," said Guadalupe Retana, Jesus' mother.

By age eleven, the growth plate of his upper thigh bone could no longer withstand the stress his extra weight created. After several months of hip pain Jesus was diagnosed with slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE).

This condition arises when the round portion of the hip separates from the shaft of the thigh bone. "It is similar to a scoop of ice cream getting shoved off the cone" explained Dr. Anthony Scaduto, orthopaedic surgeon at Los Angeles Orthopaedic Hospital.

According to the CDC, more than one third of children in the U.S. are either overweight or obese. "The incidence of SCFE has more than doubled in our hospital over the last 20 years" said Dr. Scaduto. "Studies in other regions of the US have also shown children are developing SCFE at an earlier age than they used to, and doctors think this is linked to rising childhood obesity."

In severe cases of SCFE such as Jesus', blood flow to the ball portion of the bone is compromised. This may lead to collapse and destruction of the hip joint causing significant pain and disability.

"I knew his weight could lead to heart problems when he is older but I didn't know it could cause him so much pain and problems now," says Guadalupe. "I am really worried since he can only walk a few blocks."

"Jesus' case is an example of how obesity in childhood can lead to serious and potentially life-long musculoskeletal problems," added Dr. Scaduto. "His rehabilitation will include physical therapy and a specialized weight-loss program focusing on his diet."

"I really want to run again, so I am going to do everything I need to get better," explained Jesus.

## Potential Devastating Diagnosis Often Initially Missed

Twelve-year-old Zeshan Askari had limped and experienced intermittent left knee pain for several months before he was diagnosed with slipped capital femoral epiphysis (SCFE). Patients with SCFE often have symptoms at the knee according to Dr. Howard Epps, the pediatric orthopaedic surgeon in Houston who cared for Zeshan. "Problems in the hip can cause pain anywhere from the hip down to the knee, and unfortunately this can lead to delayed diagnosis when doctors just focus on the knee," Epps explained. "I had no idea that knee pain meant he had a problem with his hip," said Asiya Askari, Zeshan's mother.

When Zeshan slipped and fell on a waterslide one weekend, the pain became more severe and localized to his hip. Zeshan's parents took him to the emergency room at Texas Children's Hospital where doctors made the diagnosis and Dr. Epps surgically stabilized Zeshan's hips. Three weeks out from surgery Zeshan's pain has almost resolved and he will soon be off his crutches.

Zeshan and his parents have been told that this is not the end of the story. "When the diagnosis is made later, children with SCFE have more significant deformity of the hip," said Dr. Epps. "It's possible that he may need more surgery in the future to return to full function," he added.

The Askari's experience had motivated them to address Zeshan's weight. "We are really trying to monitor the types of foods that Zeshan eats because we know his weight is a problem," said Ali Askari, Zeshan's father. "Exercise will be an important part of Zeshan's weight loss program," Epps added, "but we need to get his hips healed first."

Given the importance of early surgery, the U.S. Bone and Joint Initiative is emphasizing early recognition of slipped capital femoral epiphysis during Bone and Joint Health National Awareness Week, Oct. 12–20, 2011.

Bone and Joint Health National Awareness Week aims to raise awareness of musculoskeletal health, stimulate research and improve quality of life. For more information, visit [www.usbjd.org/rd/?NAW](http://www.usbjd.org/rd/?NAW).

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