

Summerville Medical Center partners with KidsandCars.org Safety Initiative

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Summerville, S.C. When Deona Ryan talks about the dangers of leaving children unattended in cars, she makes her point in a powerful way. Having lost her own daughter to heat stroke due to being left in a hot car by a babysitter, she has chosen to take that loss and use it to educate parents and others about auto-related dangers. To do that effectively, she now works with KidsandCars.org, a group that reaches out to new parents and other caregivers to educate them about car and infant/child safety.

“Janette Fennell, the president and founder of KidsandCars.org, began her journey when she was kidnapped and locked in a trunk,” Ryan explains. “Because of her hard work and diligence, cars now have a glow-in-the-dark trunk release so that someone inside can easily get out. As she was on that journey, she came in contact with a lot of people who told her about the dangers to children, such as power-window strangulation, that comes from them being left alone in cars.”

Ryan’s daughter Aslyn died after her sitter left her in the car for about an hour while running errands. After determining that no parent should suffer what she had, Ryan began her own nonprofit, then teamed up with Fennell’s organization. A law subsequently passed in Hawaii (where she and her family were living) made leaving a child unattended a traffic violation, and the law also has an education component, which Ryan says is the most important thing.

And now, thanks to a grant from Toyota, brochures and other education materials are distributed at all HCA facilities nationwide. Menorah Medical Center in Overland Park, Kansas, started using the KidsandCars.org Look Before You Lock brochures in 2011.

“We looked for a long time for a way to explain this issue to new parents. It is more than just saying ‘don’t leave your baby in the car,’” says Gina Shay-Zapien, Perinatal Clinical Nurse Specialist and Child Passenger Safety Technician.

“Most cases of heatstroke result from a child being unintentionally left in a car. It is a problem of distraction. Car seats can be difficult to install, so many families will buy a seat for each vehicle. Parents and caregivers can get accustomed to seeing the rear-facing seat in the back seat. Sleep deprivation, hectic lives and changing schedules can result in a mental lapse and the sleeping baby is not seen. The biggest risk comes from parents who think ‘That could never happen to me!’”

“When I first began this journey in 2004, I would go to safety meetings and talk about this education, but nobody wanted to hear it,” Ryan says. “People were more concerned about seats, belts, passenger safety issues. More kids died from heat strokes in cars than from being hit by airbags in the front seat. Now kids are being placed in the back seat, but people need to remember to get their children out, and take 3 seconds to open the back doors before they leave the car.

For more information, visit www.kidsandcars.org, or to obtain brochures for your facility, contact Ryan [here](#).

<http://www.hcatodayblog.com/2012/12/05/summerville-medical-center-partners-with-kidsandcars-org-safety-initiative/>