Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Accelerating the Future*, a monthly newsletter about health equity and disparities issues published by the Center for Health Equity (CHE). The aim of this newsletter is to provide an introduction to CHE and information on a wide range of resources, events, and services available to health equity researchers at the University of Minnesota. If you would like to join our listserv, please contact John Jodzio at umnche@umn.edu. It is the best way to be informed of key events, and on average, we send no more than one e-mail a week.

CHE was founded in 2009 by a NIH (P60) Comprehensive Centers of Excellence in Minority Health and Health Disparities grant. The achievement of that award, in addition to other grants awarded around the University such as EMPAcT (RC2; PI Selwyn Vickers) and CNP II (U54; PI Kola Okuyemi), indicates that there is a greater commitment and resources than ever before across the University to provide students, investigators, and the community with training and resources for conducting research in minority health. CHE seeks to provide a framework within the University for the conduct of research, training of current or future investigators, and outreach to the community.

The Center is located in the 717 Delaware building and has space in the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC) building in the Northside community in Minneapolis for community-based research and programs.

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Director’s Update, continued

Our Center aims to: 1) Promote health equity and minority health research at the University and with our partners. 2) Strengthen our community partnerships to improve the health of minorities and new immigrants. 3) Integrate the University’s minority health and health disparities resources into an easy-to-navigate, seamless infrastructure that fosters connections and communication across communities, academic disciplines, and institutional units. 4) Recruit, train, and mentor students, fellows, faculty, and future research leaders who are from underrepresented populations and/or wishing to conduct work in minority health and health disparities. 5) Support one funded research project – a randomized intervention trial that will employ community health workers and state-of-the-art biomarker feedback to encourage cessation and home-smoking restriction among African American families.

As the Center continues to grow, we hope you will become involved in its activities, as we work to overcome health disparities through our research, training, and outreach efforts. Please share your thoughts and ideas with us at umnche@umn.edu.

Research Training and Education Core

Ethnic minorities are underrepresented across the entire spectrum of the health profession. Greater diversity is needed in order to create a culturally sensitive environment and adequate role models for the next generation of investigators. The goal of the Research Training and Education Core is to increase the number of minority clinicians, researchers, and educators. Through our partnership with the Medical School’s Minnesota Future Doctors program, we have selected to support nine scholars for mentorship and a research experience hosted by our program.

CHE Undergraduate Research Scholars

Scholar: Callistus Ditah, Junior, University of Minnesota
Mentor: Kathleen T. Call, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Health Policy Management, School of Public Health
Project Title(s):
1. Understanding Barriers to HPV Vaccination Among Young Somali Women
2. Disparities and Barriers to Utilization Among Minnesota Health Care Program Enrollees

Description:
Project 1: We are working with the Somali community in Minnesota to try to capture barriers that prevent them from accepting the HPV vaccine.
Project 2: A significant portion of Minnesota residents are enrolled under the MinnesotaCare, a state-funded and federally subsidized program that provides insurance to uninsured children and adults. Data shows that these enrollees are not fully utilizing the services offered through this program. The data indicates that many are more likely to use the emergency room. We are investigating the barriers that prevent enrollees from fully utilizing these services.

Scholar: Winta Ghedei, Junior, University of St. Thomas
Mentor: Tracie Collins, M.D., Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Medical School
Project Title(s):
1. Dietary Habits, Physical Activity, and Stress: Risk Factors for Hyperglycemia in Eritreans and Ethiopians Residing in the U.S.
2. Promoting Walking in African Americans with Peripheral Arterial Disease: A Review Article

Scholar: Joohee Han, Sophomore, University of Minnesota
Mentor: Masato Yamamoto, M.D., Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Surgery, Medical School
Project Title: Genetic Engineering of Adenovirus for Gene/Viro-Therapy of Pancreatic Cancer
Description: The aim is to develop a safer and more potent conditionally replicative adenovirus (CRAd) to bring forth a promising therapy to treat pancreatic cancer, one of the most aggressive malignancies.
Scholar: Mahmoud Hatab, Junior, University of Minnesota  
Mentor: Paul A. Iaizzo, Ph.D., Professor of Surgery; Integrative Biology and Physiology; Anesthesiology  
Project Title: Cardiomyocyte Cell Cultures: Preservation Solutions and the Viability Rates  
Description: We are testing cell culture preservation and viability conditions to deduce the best media and temperature scenario for transplant surgery. We aim to define the best conditions to maximize the duration of heart survival before implantation.

Scholar: Dame Idossa, Junior, University of Minnesota  
Mentor: Agustin P. Dalmasso, M.D., Professor of Surgery; Medical School  
Project Title: Effects of Cytokine Treatment on Cell Lysis  
Description: Previous studies in Dr. Dalmasso’s lab have shown that various substances, such as interleukin-4 (IL-4) and IL-13, induce protection of porcine aortic endothelial cells (ECs). ECs derived from other vessels such as the microvasculature from swine and from other species have not been studied. The objective of the project is to investigate the hypothesis that IL-4 and IL-13 also protect complement-mediated killing of porcine microvasculature ECs and of ECs of human origin. Because the only source of complement studied so far is human, another objective is to investigate if the various cytokine-treated ECs are also protected from other complement sources.

Scholar: Khadijo Ismail, Junior, University of Minnesota  
Mentor: Sue Everson-Rose, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Medical School  
Project Title: Healthy Immigrants Families in Varied Environment (HIFIVE)  
Description: The goal of this research is to seek input from Hmong, Latino, and Somali community members to determine their perceptions and knowledge of psychosocial and socio-environmental risk and resiliency factors believed to be important for health, especially cardiovascular disease and diabetes risk within their communities.

Scholar: Neli Mottey, Junior, University of Minnesota  
Mentor: Jean L. Forster, Ph.D., M.P.H., Professor, Division of Epidemiology & Community Health, School of Public Health  
Project Title: MN Adolescent Community Cohort Study  
Description: This project surveys universities and colleges in Minnesota in order to document how various institutions reinforce smoking policies.

Scholar: Isaac Palma-Zamora, Junior, University of St. Thomas  
Mentor: Steven S. Fu, M.D., Associate Professor, Department of Medicine, Meical School  
Project Title(s):  
1. Tobacco Cessation Treatment for Diverse, Low Income Smokers  
2. Improving the Delivery of Smoking Cessation Guidelines in Hospitalized Veterans  
Description:  
Project 1: We test a novel proactive outreach strategy, coupled with free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) to increase the population impact of tobacco cessation treatment for diverse, low income smokers.  
Project 2: We aim to determine whether a nurse-initiated intervention, which couples brief inpatient counseling and proactive telephone counseling by a centralized tobacco quitline, improves 6-month cessation rates in hospitalized VA smokers.

Scholar: Hanh Nguyen, Junior, University of Minnesota  
Mentor: Kola S. Okuyemi, M.D., M.P.H., Associate Professor, Family Medicine, Medical School  
Project: Motivating Patients in Primary Care to Utilize Minnesota Helpline  
Description: Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. Although smoking cessation is the most cost-effective method of disease prevention for adults, many smoking cessation interventions are underused by smokers. The study’s primary goal is to access how successful the 3-session, phone-based, motivation interviewing intervention is at encouraging initially unmotivated adult smokers in primary care practice to use the Minnesota QUITPLAN Helpline.
Community Engagement Core

The primary objective of the Community Engagement and Outreach Core is to engage African American and African immigrant communities in the Twin Cities in efforts to improve minority health and reduce health disparities. The Community Engagement & Outreach Core aims:

- To establish a community-academic partnership that will provide a unifying and transformative organizational framework for improving minority health in the Twin Cities.
- To engage community partners from the local African American and African immigrant (Somali) communities in the dissemination of interventions to promote fruit and vegetable consumption and reduce tobacco use.

Core activities, guided by the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR), are a collaborative effort among the University of Minnesota, the Stairstep Foundation (which has a coalition of 32 African American churches in the Twin Cities), and WellShare International. The current collaboration is actively implementing two outreach projects: Stairstep Foundation’s project is aimed at promoting fruit and vegetable consumption within a large network of African American Churches in North Minneapolis, and WellShare International is developing a structured, youth-driven program focusing on healthy youth development and academic and health-related goals.