Looking back, Looking forward

Happy new year and best wishes for 2011! We had a great 2010 at the Center for Health Equity. From the start of our monthly Center for Health Equity Research Rounds, which bring in renowned researchers in health disparities to the University of Minnesota, to our undergraduate scholars program, which matched nine undergraduate students to faculty research mentors, we have been busy. Our space at the Urban Research and Outreach/Engagement Center (UROC), so generously provided, is being used for community-based research. The monthly Works in Progress seminar, focusing on research ideas and early work, is expanding. In January, our second Building Bridges focused on educational disparities and more events are planned. Finally, our collaborative efforts with the Program in Health Disparities Research recently brought over 75 community members and University researchers together for an annual dinner and poster session.

In the upcoming months, we will continue to build momentum. The most exciting development is our upcoming Annual Symposium, The Changing Face of Health in the United States, at Coffman Memorial Union on April 19th. A collaboration with the Program in Health Disparities, the Health Disparities Working Group, and the Minnesota Center for Cancer Collaborations, the symposium features a poster session with lunch provided, and it is open to students, fellows, faculty, and community scholars. Deadline for submissions is March 1, 2011, and there will be awards in a number of categories.

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Community Outreach and Biomarker Feedback for Smoke-Free African American Homes

The center sponsors a smoking cessation research project led by Janet Thomas, Ph.D., and her faculty investigative team: Jasjit S. Ahluwalia, M.D., M.P.H., Larry An, M.D., (now at UMich), Deborah Hennrikus, Ph.D., Xianghua Luo, Ph.D. and David Wetter, Ph.D. of MD Anderson Cancer Center. Elaine Elliott, CHE administrative director, recently met with Thomas and asked her to tell us more about her project.

Elaine: Dr. Thomas, your training background is in clinical psychology with an emphasis on behavioral medicine. What experiences directed your interest to tobacco control in underserved populations?

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**Director’s Update, continued**

This issue of *Accelerating the Future* focuses on the Research Core and the research project *Community Outreach and Biomarker Feedback for Smoke-Free African American Homes* led by Janet Thomas, Ph.D. This cutting edge project is an exciting component of the center’s activities.

As we grow, we hope you will join in our work to reach health equity. If you would like to become more involved, get more information, or join our listerv, e-mail us at umnche@umn.edu.

Sincerely,

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**Research Project, continued**

**Dr. Thomas:** I completed my doctoral training at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge. As a student, I worked in a psychology clinic at a charity hospital. I was struck by the large number of stressful life events endured by the patients we treated, the high rates of psychiatric illness, and the use of smoking as a self-reported coping mechanism. Among our African American patients, many had coexisting diabetes, and the number of patients with lower limb amputations was alarming. When I learned the association of smoking, arterial disease, and amputation – particularly among African American patients with diabetes – I elected to focus my research on stress and smoking. During some preliminary work directed by my graduate school advisor, we discovered that social support could buffer the impact of stress on diabetes outcomes, and that social support was also associated with improved smoking cessation. Therefore, my interests narrowed to attempts to increase social support among this high-risk group. This work obviously has expanded now to include other ways to decrease smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke.

**Elaine:** What do you hope to learn from your research?

**Dr. Thomas:** We hope to evaluate the impact of providing parents with objective data documenting their child’s exposure to the secondhand smoke on their decision to adopt, follow, and complete home smoking bans. We will deliver the laboratory results of children’s urine samples using a team composed of a community health worker and a trained counselor. Our counseling approach combines a spirit of understanding that change is difficult and respect for the parent’s rights with the use

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**Research Services**

CHE offers a grant review program to support applications for external peer review prior to submission to a funding agency. This program is open to full-time University of Minnesota post-doctoral fellows, research associates, and faculty from any University campus whose research proposal fits within defined categories. Complete details may be found at: [http://www.med.umn.edu/che/research/externalreview/index.htm](http://www.med.umn.edu/che/research/externalreview/index.htm).
of a wellness plan that will allow parents to address barriers to smoking behavioral change (for example, stress).

Elaine: What markers are you measuring in this study? Why?

Dr. Thomas: We will be measuring children’s exposure to tobacco-related toxins including nicotine, cotinine, and a tobacco-specific carcinogen, NNK. In addition, we will attempt to quantify the presence of another carcinogen, NNA, a potential marker of thirdhand exposure. We also will measure parental carbon monoxide and cigarettes smoked per day. As part of our assessment, we will examine home air quality through the use of an air quality monitoring machine which quantifies environmental air pollutants. To objectively measure home secondhand smoke exposure, we will use a passive nicotine dosimeter. This small badge collects airborne nicotine particles. These badges are sent to a special lab at the University of California – Berkeley where the nicotine can be quantified. To objectively measure home thirdhand smoke exposure, we will take a surface sample from the home and the car.

Elaine: Can you tell us about your research team and the special skills they need to have?

Dr. Thomas: Our team is one of the most exciting parts of this project. We have the commitment of our partner, Northpoint Health and Wellness Center in North Minneapolis. Together we have hired two of their community health workers to provide resource counseling to our participants. Both are African American women who are familiar with the needs of residents of North Minneapolis and are passionate about addressing the health needs of children in this community. We have a trained counselor, also from the North Minneapolis community, who has a wealth of experience providing health behavior change counseling to our community. Additionally, we hired a recent M.P.H. graduate in child and maternal health, also from the community, to serve as our study assessment provider. We are also fortunate to have retained several staff from our pilot study (Healthy Homes for Healthy Kids, American Lung Association). Karen Omlung and Meredith Schreier continue to work as our research managers, Mike Dahip and Hawa Forka are our student researchers, Sue Lowry is our database manager and Qi Wang is one of two statisticians. We have also compiled the expertise of several world experts in the area of tobacco control. These include Drs. Steven Hecht, Mel Hovell, Katherine Hammond, Belinda Borrelli and David Wetter. Last, I am grateful to my scientific mentors and co-investigators on this project, Drs. Jas Ahluwalia, Larry An, Xianghua Luo and Deb Hennrikus.

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**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CORE**

**Update on our collaboration with the Stairstep Foundation and WellShare International**

The Community Engagement and Outreach Core has two specific aims: to establish a community-academic partnership that will provide a unifying and transformative organizational framework for improving minority health in the Twin Cities; and, to engage community partners from the local African American and African Immigrant communities in the dissemination of interventions to promote healthy living. These two aims are accomplished in partnership with two community organizations – Stairstep Foundation and WellShare International.

Please see our website for more information on these projects (http://www.med.umn.edu/che/Community/index.htm).

**RESEARCH PROJECT, continued**

**Elaine:** What outcomes do you feel your research will produce?

**Dr. Thomas:** The results of our pilot indicated that families receiving the biomarker feedback were more likely to implement complete home smoking restrictions and more likely to feel confident in their ability to follow complete smoking restrictions. They also had elevated perception of risk regarding their children’s exposure level. Given the improvements we are making in the current trial, we expect that our participants will complete the trial with increased knowledge about their child’s exposure to secondhand smoke, increased motivation to make their homes smoke free, and overall increased well-being given the additional resources and social support our intervention will provide.

Please see our website for full interview (http://www.med.umn.edu/che/publications/home.html).

**MAILING LIST, EVENTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES**

The Center for Health Equity sends out occasional e-mails of interest to our listserv. If you’d like to be included, please send an e-mail to umnche@umn.edu asking to be added. Check out our website for monthly events and seminars! www.med.umn.edu/che

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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Pictured at left: Diana Dubois, WellShare International

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