Grant to help North Carolina improve public health service quality nationwide

North Carolina received a $449,590 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to improve the quality of public health and prepare for national public health accreditation. The three-year grant, which became effective April 15, 2008, will be administered by the School's service arm—the N.C. Institute for Public Health.

The grant is part of a national program managed by the National Network of Public Health Institutes (NNPHI) and the Public Health Leadership Society (PHLS). North Carolina is one of 16 states chosen to participate in the program. The grant will support projects aimed at specific health outcomes such as decreasing the incidence of vaccine-preventable diseases or reducing the burden of illness due to tobacco or alcohol use.

"North Carolina is a leader in this national movement in public health known as accreditation," says Dr. Edward L. Baker, NCIPH director and UNC professor of health policy and management, who will lead the project. "We are lucky in our state to have a strong partnership of the Institute, the state Division of Public Health and the North Carolina Association of Local Health Directors working together in what is now known as the North Carolina Accreditation Learning Collaborative."

UNC health researchers explore how to take interactive video games to the next level

It’s not just children! Many young adults also spend hours every day playing interactive video games. Is there a way, UNC researchers wondered, to make those games healthier for people to play?

Dr. Deborah Tate, assistant professor in the School’s Departments of Health Behavior and Health Education and Nutrition, will lead UNC’s efforts to explore how these games could be better designed to improve players’ health. The project, supported by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation involves research teams at UNC and 11 other institutions.

"Research shows that young adults play video games as much as—or in some cases more than—children do," Tate says. "Since young adulthood is a time of decreasing physical activity and rapid weight gain, video games may provide a more active form of leisure than traditional TV for this age group."

Tate and doctoral student Elizabeth Lyons, an avid gamer, will investigate people’s motivations to expend energy while playing video games. They will compare traditional video games played on home consoles with more active games requiring physical movement beyond pushing buttons or flicking the wrist. These active games require that players use a controller such as a dance pad, balance board or even a guitar.

The researchers will look at effects of types of controllers that players use, the influence of players’ perspectives in the game and their feelings of presence and intrinsic motivation. Fifty men and 50 women, ages 18 to 35, will participate in the study, which will examine 10 games.

"The findings may help us understand how to make traditional games more active and active games more compelling," Lyons says.

To date, 34 counties and the state itself have passed strict performance standards to be accredited.

"North Carolina has demonstrated a commitment to improving the quality of its public health services and programs. North Carolina’s work will lead the way as other local and state public health agencies across the nation prepare for accreditation and strive to create healthier communities," says Dr. James S. Marks, senior vice president and director of the health group at RWJF.

For more information, visit www.sph.unc.edu/nciphnews/servicequality.html.