A community network

Another project reaching people where they live — the Carolina Community Network (CCN) — was funded by the National Cancer Institute in 2005 to reduce prostate, breast and colorectal cancer disparities among African-Americans in North Carolina through education, training and research.

The CCN is led by Dr. Paul Godley, adjunct associate professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at the UNC School of Public Health, associate professor of hematology and oncology at the UNC School of Medicine and director of the UNC Program on Ethnicity, Culture and Health Outcomes (ECHO).

CCN’s many projects include providing support and information to help two established community organizations in Eastern and Central North Carolina incorporate cancer-prevention messages into the programs they already offer, says Crystal Meyer, CCN program coordinator.

For example, the CCN recently helped the United Voices of Efland-Cheeks (in Orange County, N.C.) work with a UNC postdoctoral research associate to conduct a seminar about the relationship between diet, exercise and cancer prevention for members of an existing support group for men affected by prostate cancer.

In Eastern North Carolina, CCN partners with The Rocky Mount Opportunities Industrialization Center, which runs a family medical center and a mobile health clinic that has primarily offered HIV/AIDS screening in Nash and Edgecombe counties. The CCN works with the center to add cancer-prevention services to those offerings.

“Over time, we’d like to expand the partnership to include more community partners and hopefully more diseases so that we can have a bigger effect,” Godley says.

The CCN has also been working with churches in Rocky Mount, N.C. “We’ve been trying to connect with churches to let them know about the Body and Soul nutrition intervention program, and we’re planning to do one-on-one sessions with churches to implement healthy eating and lifestyle programs with their congregations,” Meyer says.

The Carolina Community Network has plans to conduct one-on-one sessions with churches in Rocky Mount, N.C., to implement healthy eating and lifestyle programs into congregations.

Dr. Paul Godley

that cancer can develop,” Sandler says. Examples include DNA repair genes and tumor suppressor genes, which, when mutated, don’t perform their normal function of suppressing cancer.

“So if you have a certain pattern of mutations, for example, is your prognosis worse? Or do people with certain tumor characteristics respond differently to chemotherapy or to radiation therapy? By taking advantage of the CanCORS data set, we’ll have extensive information on the kinds of chemotherapy patients received and the kinds of radiation that they got,” Sandler says.

The CanCORS study is scheduled to follow the patients for one year, though Sandler and colleagues are seeking additional funding. “We’d really like to be able to follow these people for a long period of time,” he says. Studies like these are among the most important being done because they help researchers answer the many key questions that have plagued us for years, such as, “What difference does it make when a person gets into the health care system or where they are treated? Is income more important than race? Is tumor type the most important factor?” Much hope lies with large, interdisciplinary studies, led by strong teams like CanCORS, to answer these and other questions with credible data.

— By Angela Spivey
In formal programs and projects, through faculty- and student-led efforts, in courses and seminars throughout the curriculum, the School provides future public health professionals with the tools they need to understand the nature of health disparities, intervene, and ultimately eliminate health disparities. Here are some of the programs currently underway.

**Kellogg Health Scholars Program, Community Track**

When Dr. Stephanie Farquhar came to the UNC School of Public Health on a two-year, postdoctoral fellowship with the Kellogg Community Health Scholars Program, residents of some Eastern North Carolina communities were struggling with the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd. Using the community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach, Farquhar collaborated with survivors to design and conduct a survey on their needs and then to communicate the results to policy makers. The report they produced together led to substantial improvements in flood relief policy.

Her work is just one example of the CBPR done by Community Health Scholars and their mentors at the schools of public health at UNC, the University of Michigan and The Johns Hopkins University.

Of 47 scholars admitted at three schools, 27 are from minority populations (19 African-American, six Latino/Hispanic, and two Asian/Pacific Islander). Scholars have authored or co-authored more than 179 publications.

Now known as the Community Track of the Kellogg Health Scholars Program, the fellowship is in its ninth year of training a new cadre of public health professionals in health disparities and all their investigations follow the principles and guidelines of CBPR. Topics include youth violence, smoking, environmental justice, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, women’s health, mental health, obesity, sexual health, air quality, bilingual training of health workers, hypertension among African-American men, genetics and disparities, stress, cancer and substance abuse.

Scholars who choose the UNC site work closely with faculty mentors and community mentors affiliated with African-American and Latino community-based coalitions.

Dr. Eugenia Eng, professor of health behavior and health education at the School, directs the fellowship program at UNC and builds working relationships among academics, community members and public health practitioners. These research partnerships benefit under-served communities. They also develop a group of health leaders with the skills to eliminate health disparities.

W. K. Kellogg Foundation funds the fellowship program.

**Strengthening Bioethics Capacity and Justice in Health**

Ethical challenges often arise in the conduct of biomedical research in developing countries from the very same social, economic and political conditions that contribute to poor health outcomes. War, poverty, oppression, the infringement of basic human rights—all may have a powerful impact on health, affect some groups more than others, and may make it difficult to realize the goal of improving public health while protecting and benefiting individuals and communities. Yet until recently, there were few programs to train professionals from the developing world in research ethics that take such inequalities and injustices into account.

Dr. Frieda Behets, associate professor of epidemiology at the UNC School of Public Health, in collaboration with Dr. Stuart Rennie, research assistant professor in the UNC School of Dentistry, Dr. Gail Henderson, professor of social medicine at the UNC School of Medicine, and colleagues from Kinshasa School of Public Health, they will strengthen ethical review at the Kinshasa School of Public Health and kinshasa will offer a two-week intensive course in bioethics for medical professionals from throughout French-speaking African countries. This course is unlike any other and represents a unique partnership between the UNC School of Public Health and the University of Kinshasa.

**Emerging Leaders in Public Health**

As president of Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio, Minnesota’s premier Latino social and behavioral health service provider, Jesse Birkhe Gomez, helps improve the health of that state’s Latino population. Gomez has spearheaded two major health assessments, including one on health disparities. He promotes health care access for Latinos and serves on a citizens’ panel charged with identifying solutions to the growing cost of healthcare.

Gomez is just one of the professionals putting into practice the high-level leadership and crisis management skills he honed in the Emerging Leaders in Public Health Training at the Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium and then spend up to six months with mentors at UNC. While in Chapel Hill, scholars complete Institutional Review Board (IRB) training, develop curricula and training modules around bioethics issues in the developing world and strengthen their capacity for independent research.

When they return to the new Center of Bioethics at the Kinshasa School of Public Health, they will strengthen ethical training of the IRB there and promote creative, responsible, culturally resonant solutions to bioethical conflicts. Teaching materials the scholars develop at Carolina will be integrated into the Master’s of Public Health program at Kinshasa. Impact of their training will spread even further in 2008, when the center will offer a two-week intensive course in bioethics for medical professionals from throughout French-speaking African countries. This course is unlike any other and represents a unique partnership between the UNC School of Public Health and the University of Kinshasa.
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Now known as the Community Track of the Kellogg Health Scholars Program, the fellowship is in its third year of training a new cadre of public health faculty. Alumni leave the program with skills needed to build the capacity of communities, health agencies and academic centers such that these entities then function as equal partners in research, practice and education.

Alumni from the program now hold faculty positions in 20 academic institutions and professional positions in four health agencies and institutions, an important measure of success.

Virtually all the research carried out by Community Health Scholars addresses issues of health disparities, and all their investigations follow the principles and guidelines of CBPR. Topics include youth violence, smoking, environmental justice, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, women’s health, mental health, obesity, sexual health, air quality, bilingual training of health workers, hypertension among African-American men, genetics and disparities, stress, cancer and substance abuse.

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**Training Tomorrow’s Leaders**

**Carolina Public Health**
The Carolina-Shaw Partnership for the Elimination of Health Disparities

This partnership between UNC and Shaw University, a historically Black university, is working to eliminate differences in minority health care and status on several levels.

One of the most important aspects of the center’s work is in establishing research resources and improving research infrastructure at Shaw so that more African-American college students can become health researchers. The center is also training new investigators at both institutions in health disparities research methodology, and collaborating on a church-based community outreach project.

The partnership has additionally created the health disparities curriculum at UNC and another at Shaw, awarded pilot funds to junior faculty at UNC and historically Black colleges and universities in North Carolina, and spurred intense inter-university faculty collaboration.

“The structure of the partnership maximizes the exchange of scientific and programmatic activity between UNC, Shaw University, and the North Carolina Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities,” says Dr. Daniel Howard, the partnership’s co-director. Howard is professor of health policy and director of the Institute for Health, Social, and Community Research at Shaw University in Raleigh, N.C.

Funded by the National Institutes of Health, National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, the partnership is directed by Dr. Paul Godley, adjunct associate professor of epidemiology and biostatistics at the UNC School of Public Health and professor of hematology and oncology at the UNC School of Medicine. Dr. Timothy Carey is the partnership’s deputy director. Carey directs the UNC Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research and is clinical professor of epidemiology in the UNC School of Public Health and professor of medicine in the UNC School of Medicine.

Interdisciplinary Certificate in Health Disparities

The Interdisciplinary Certificate in Health Disparities, an integrated program of courses and seminars at the UNC School of Public Health, trains health professionals to assess disparities, conduct basic science on contributing factors, measure access to care, evaluate the role of race and racism in health, and develop and evaluate interventions designed to reduce health disparities.

The certificate program is part of ECHO, the UNC Program on Ethnicity, Culture and Health Outcomes, a joint program of the Schools of Public Health and Medicine.

The health disparities curriculum, on which the certificate program is based, originally was developed through a grant from the Commonwealth Foundation and the Public Health Leadership Program. The curriculum is directed by Dr. Vijaya Hogan, clinical associate professor of maternal and child health in the UNC School of Public Health and adjunct associate professor of obstetrics and gynecology in the UNC School of Medicine. Hogan and Dr. Anissa Vines, research assistant professor of epidemiology at the School and associate director of ECHO, co-direct the certificate program.

Students in Action

Even as they pursue their degrees, undergraduate and graduate students at the UNC School of Public Health are doing practical public health work in communities in the United States and abroad. 

“Large part of public health is bringing your knowledge to the public, so having the experience of planning something major like this is great,” says LaToya White, one of the co-chairs of the 2007 Minority Health Conference, to be held February 23 at the UNC William and Ida Friday Center for Continuing Education.

White and co-chair Nancy DeSouza are graduate students in the Health Behavior and Health Education department in the UNC School of Public Health. They’re also members of the Minority Student Caucus, which launched the annual event in 1977 (see page 52). The conference is the oldest student-organized minority health conference in the United States. Every year, it draws hundreds of students, professionals and community members from across the country. Last year, more than 300 people attended.

“You can experience all aspects of public health at the conference, and it really influences how students see themselves as professionals coming into public health,” White says. “Students hear firsthand what works well for other people, and they also hear from community members. They’re better able to serve their communities because of this experience.” DeSouza echoes that view: “One of the benefits of the conference is getting all these different voices in the same room,” she says. “It adds to students’ professional experience. They’re networking not only with professionals and public health experts, but also with other students who will be working in the health field.”

“The event is also an important educational event for public health practitioners, human services professionals, research staff, and students and faculty from other universities,” DeSouza says.

The topic for the 2007 conference is “HIV/AIDS after 25 years: Where things were, are, and are going for minority communities.” The keynote speaker will be Dr. David J. Malebranche, assistant professor of medicine at Emory University’s School of Medicine, AIDS researcher with a public health background and physician who treats AIDS patients in Atlanta.

The student organizers want to keep the focus domestic, White says. They plan to look at HIV/AIDS in various minority communities in the United States. “We want to look at college-age students and the different issues for women. We hope to have representatives come and represent the different minority groups — African-American, Latino, Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian.”

DeSouza and White served on the planning committee for last year’s conference on “community-based participatory research.” “It’s a major conference, and a lot goes into organizing it,” White says. “It’s beneficial for students to be involved in planning something like —

(continued on page 44)
Health (ELPH) program, which the N.C. Institute for Public Health at the UNC School of Public Health leads in partnership with the UNC Kenan-Flagler School of Business. Gomez’s fellow ELPH alumni include African-Americans, American Indians, Asian Americans and other Latino Americans—members of some of the minority groups under-represented in public health leadership.

The two-year-old ELPH program promotes diversity among the next generation of public health leaders by identifying talented individuals and training them to manage in turbulent times through an intensive nine-month program of onsite workshops and distance education. Mekeisha Williams is the director of the Emerging Leaders in Public Health Fellowship, which is funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

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this because these are skills that will be needed later when working in the field of public health.

The Minority Student Caucus was formed in the early 1970s, in part to help diversify the profession by attracting more students of color to the School. Other School organizations involved in the conference include the Student Union Board, the Minority Health Project and the N.C. Institute for Public Health. The North Carolina Department of Health also supports the event, along with the UNC School of Public Health. The conference keynote lecture is broadcast each year by satellite and Internet, and the lecture abstract, slides and Webcast are archived online at the conference Web site at www.minority.unc.edu/sph/minconf. Videotapes of the broadcast are distributed by the Public Health Foundation.

These technologies expand the conference’s impact beyond the roughly 500 people who take part each year. “I’ve only been able to ‘attend’ the Webcast of these lectures,” Professor Alice Furumoto-Dawson of the University of Chicago told past organizers. “Yet, every year the UNC School of Public Health Minority Health Conference Webcast and its associated Web site have been among the most informative and useful events/resources I access during the year.”

Through the Action-Oriented Community Diagnosis class (see page 57), student teams get real-world experience with communities and service providers and learn to analyze the social determinants of health. In this class and in many other ways, public health professionals still in training at the School are putting their education—and their passion—to work on community health issues, and they’re broadening their knowledge at the same time. Here are a few examples:

- Naman Shah, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Public Health from the School’s Department of Environmental Science and Engineering in May 2006, went to Cambodia as an undergraduate to train American and Cambodian health workers in genetic techniques he developed for detecting drug resistance in malaria. He also spent three weeks in Guyana as a mentor for a project on malaria and iron deficiency anemia. He is now an immunization officer with the World Health Organization polio eradication campaign in India. Working directly with underserved individuals and populations has strengthened his commitment to a public health career, he says. It also brings him great personal satisfaction.

- Between her junior and senior years, Barbara Frank spent a month in Guadalajara, Mexico, taking medical Spanish classes and volunteering at a free clinic. The hands-on experience confirmed her decision to become a physician. She completed her Bachelor of Science in Public Health in the School’s Department of Nutrition this year and is now in medical school. She plans to provide care to the Latino community. “To see the healthcare status in Mexico and realize that I could help once I receive my degree made it even more clear that I was choosing the right profession,” she says.

- Robin Bergs, who earned her Master of Public Health in Maternal and Child Health this year, worked with Dr. Frieda Behets as a research assistant on a Global Health Fellowship in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Robin says that UNC understands that a crucial part of education is not leaving lessons in the classroom but applying them immediately in the field, whether that means working with migrant workers in North Carolina or pregnant women in the Congo.

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