

## Research connects past and future



Dr. Barbara K. Rimer

In this spring issue, we focus on research-in-progress, as befits the season. We highlight people who are developing new solutions to public health problems and acknowledge that their successes are built upon a foundation of scholarship and research that connects the past to the future. Excellence, quality, creativity and innovation are hallmarks of the people featured here. I find several lessons in their projects.

- **Taking solutions to scale.** Associate Professor Will Vizueté and colleagues saw that the best way to disseminate their miniaturized air-monitoring device was to commercialize it. BioDepronix is a vital step in realizing their vision, a success supported by partners including Dr. Don Rose, director of UNC's Carolina KickStart Program, and Don Holzworth, the School's Executive in Residence.
- **Getting support for pilot research.** Pilot data are essential if we're to turn ideas into reality, but support for pilot projects can be hard to find. We are grateful for the gift from Dennis Gillings and Joan Gillings that funded some of the innovations described here.
- **Seeing the relevance of one field to another.** Associate Professor Suzanne Maman saw that microfinance, proven in other domains, could be used to change young men's risky behaviors. Seeing connections between fields can lead to amazing breakthroughs.
- **No public health researcher is an island.** Our research depends on teams, usually from multiple disciplines and perspectives.
- **Working with community partners.** We helped pioneer research that involves working with community partners in a collaborative, community-based manner. Nab Dasgupta's experience saving lives in Wilkes County, N.C., shows the effectiveness of such an approach.
- **Get out from the Ivory Tower.** In 2004, Professor Harvey Jeffries and colleagues constructed a smog chamber on the roof of McGavran-Greenberg Hall, connecting the chamber to a laboratory so researchers could assess the effects of smog particles on lung tissue. The project was ingenious and provided real-world data. Drs. Jason Surratt, Will Vizueté and others continue to employ the chamber in their research.
- **Question the obvious.** While I may look at the sun and see warmth, Drs. Surratt and Vizueté see chemical reactions. Sometimes, the ordinary is extraordinary.
- **Improvise.** Scientific progress rarely proceeds in straight lines. Improvisation in science, as in music, Dr. Vizueté shows, can bring us to the best discoveries.
- **In the end, though, there's an innovation** – an idea, product or program that is a better solution to a public health problem than prior solutions.

Kenan Professor Steve Zeisel could have been talking about any of these projects when he described his work at the Nutrition Research Institute. When one takes new approaches to emerging issues, he says, "the results are exciting—and the promise of the future unlimited." How true.

I hope you enjoy this issue and the special people featured here. Many more great people are connected to the Gillings School of Global Public Health, and we want you to meet them all.

Thanks for reading.

Warmly,

*Barbara K. Rimer*