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Innovation Matters!

UNC Chancellor Holden Thorp wants Carolina to be an innovation hub. As leader of a great public university and a scientist known for chemistry inventions, Thorp understands that innovations play a critical role in improving health and society. In this issue of *Carolina Public Health*, we investigate innovation's role in our School and its broader implications for public health.

Innovation refers both to some new thing—a product, program or idea thought to be an improvement over what preceded it—and a process of getting the *thing* into practice. In public health, especially in our School, we aim to solve some of the world's greatest problems—providing safe water to people who lack it, helping to change unhealthy behaviors, such as smoking and poor diets, reducing errors in operating rooms and pharmacies, and developing better ways to conduct clinical trials. Too many interventions are cumbersome, costly or culturally inappropriate. We need practical, practicable and scalable innovations that are transformative. Some inspiring examples from our School include:

- Mark Sobsey, PhD, and colleagues designed a much improved ceramic water filter. A crucial test is its adoption on a scale large enough to make a difference.
- Repellent-treated mosquito bed nets are an important innovation. Faculty members, including Drs. Frieda Behets, Andrea Biddle, Steve Meshnick, Audrey Pettifor and Annelies Van Rie, conduct field studies to ensure that nets are adopted in practice.

- Noel Brewer, PhD, and Jennifer Smith, PhD, are among the first to study how new vaccines to prevent HPV are being adopted.
- The *Safe Dates* program, developed by Vangie Foshee, PhD, and colleagues, is more effective than previous programs; it now is being used around the country.
- Deborah Tate, PhD, was one of the first to take dietary counseling online.
- Marci Campbell, PhD, was awarded an NIH Challenge Grant for her novel use of micro-finance and health behavior interventions to improve diets in eastern North Carolina.
- Sue Havala Hobbs, DrPH, and Ned Brooks, DrPH, created a new hybrid-model executive Doctor of Public Health program that allows students to keep working while earning a doctorate.

We have funded 18 Gillings Innovation Laboratories to solve big public health problems and accelerate solutions. The range of programs, from development of new laboratory tests to new ways of encouraging use of local foods, is impressive.

Many innovations are worthy of adoption. Yet, we know that the process of adopting public health innovation is painfully slow; people die waiting. Several faculty members, including Alice Ammerman, DrPH, Cathy Melvin, PhD, and Bryan Weiner, PhD, focus on speeding adoption of innovations.

Our faculty, staff, students and partners are creating ideas, programs, tests and tools to improve the public's health and translate effective programs into practice. Together, we bring life to public health "innovation." It's a matter of health!

—Louis Pasteur

To him who devotes his life to science, nothing can give more happiness than increasing the number of discoveries, but his cup of joy is full when the results of his studies immediately find practical applications.

Note: Rimer also participates in a roundtable discussion about innovation on pages 4–5.