

# Peers for Progress:

## Fisher heads global group providing diabetes support

A peer educator in Cambodia conducts weekly group sessions, offering lessons about diabetes management and advice about physical activity and nutrition.

A community health worker in rural Arizona provides support and education to medically underserved migrant workers and new immigrants with diabetes. He helps order glucometers and visits the workers if they are sick.

Peers for Progress, a program led by Edwin Fisher, PhD, professor of health behavior and health education at UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, is working to ensure that more people living with diabetes or other chronic health conditions have access to similar peer-support networks.

Ongoing support from others who are coping with similar difficulties can offer emotional, social and practical assistance that will help people become healthy.

“Unless they are very sick, people with diabetes probably spend fewer than six hours each year in a health professional’s office,” Fisher says. “That leaves 8,760 hours



Dr. Edwin Fisher

each year they are ‘on their own.’ Peer support can help people take the plans they make in the doctor’s office and put them into practice in their daily lives. They get their questions answered and stay motivated to sustain healthy patterns across those 8,760 hours.”

The American Academy of Family Physicians Foundation established Peers for Progress in 2006. Recognizing UNC’s pre-eminence in community and peer approaches to health promotion, the group asked Fisher and colleagues to host its Program Development Center a year later. Faculty members, students and research staff

from the public health school’s health behavior and health education department and UNC’s School of Medicine guide the Center.

With initial funding from Eli Lilly and Company Foundation, Peers for Progress has focused on the global diabetes epidemic, projected to grow to 439 million people by 2030.

To accelerate best practices for peer support around the world, Peers for Progress aims to expand the proof that such programs are beneficial. It collects information about the many available programs, so as to secure recognition and resources for peer support as a core component of prevention and health care.

“The niche of Peers for Progress is to network with organizations around the world to facilitate more programs, better-quality programs and more secure support so the programs can help as many people as possible,” Fisher said.

UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health has a long tradition of providing peer support in local communities. Current faculty including Eugenia Eng, DrPH, and Jo Anne Earp, ScD, professor and chair, respectively, in the Department of Health Behavior and Health Education, and Alice Ammerman, DrPH, and Marci Campbell, PhD, professors of nutrition, have been involved in a number of projects that empower individuals through individual and group peer support. ■

—Natalie Gott

Peers for Progress’ executive board met in February 2009 to honor Dr. Jose Caro (front, center) who, as an executive at Eli Lilly and Company, conceived of the initial plan for Peers for Progress. The board includes UNC public health faculty members Drs. Jo Anne Earp, Ed Fisher, Laura Linnan and Deborah Tate.



Learn more about Peers for Progress at [www.peersforprogress.org](http://www.peersforprogress.org).

For information about MoPoTsyo, a non-governmental peer-support program in Cambodia, visit [www.mopotsyo.org/peereducation.html](http://www.mopotsyo.org/peereducation.html).

For information about Campesinos Diabetes Management Program, a peer-support group in Arizona, visit [www.diabetesinitiative.org/programs/DICSF.html](http://www.diabetesinitiative.org/programs/DICSF.html).