

News and Notes

New report outlines status of California's county mental health programs

California's county mental health departments spent most of their budgets on outpatient services, with low overhead and low spending on hospitalization, according to a report released November 6, 2007, by the **Nicholas C. Petris Center on Health Care Markets and Consumer Welfare**. The survey covers the structure, organization, and financing of county mental health departments in the 2004 fiscal year, providing baseline data on each county before voters passed the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) later that same year.

"The report provides a clear starting point for future measurements of how effectively the new funds and services resulting from the MHSA will improve the lives of mentally ill people in California," said Petris Center director **Richard Scheffler, Ph.D.**, Distinguished Professor of Health Economics & Public Policy and coauthor of the report.

The survey is part of a three-year study by the Petris Center, funded by the California HealthCare Foundation, to evaluate the impact of the MHSA. **Timothy Brown, Ph.D. '99**, associate director of research at the Petris Center, is another report coauthor.

New center harnesses campus expertise to develop screening technologies

School of Public Health professors are teaming up with researchers across the UC Berkeley campus to create the **Center for Exposure Biology**, a new research collaboration that will focus on developing biomarkers and biosensors to allow cost-effective testing for blood cancer risks.

Stephen Rappaport, Ph.D., adjunct professor of environmental health sciences, will direct the program and will lead one of its three interdisciplinary projects.

The center is being established with funds from a \$4.7 million grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) announced on September 4, 2007. The grant is part of the Exposure Biology Program of the Genes, Environment, and Health Initiative at the National Institutes of Health, a program which seeks to develop innova-

tive technologies to better understand the interplay of environmental exposure to contaminants and genetic variations on human disease.

Researchers find evidence linking stress caused by the 9/11 disaster with low birth weights

A UC Berkeley-led study has found evidence of an increase in low birth weights among babies born in and around New York City in the weeks and months after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. In the article published in the October 10, 2007, issue of the journal *Human Reproduction*, the authors suggest that stress may have contributed to the effect.

Brenda Eskenazi, Ph.D., professor of maternal and child health and epidemiology at the School of Public Health and director of the Center for Children's Environmental Health, and colleagues studied data from birth certificates of 1,660,401 babies born in New York between January 1996 and December 2002. They divided the babies into those born in New York City (NYC)—whose mothers would, therefore, have been living closest to the disaster zone—and those born in upstate New York, which they defined as anyone living outside NYC, including Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester Counties.

When they compared data from babies born in the week before the disaster with those born in the week after in NYC, they found a shift in the distribution of low birth weights (LBW), with a higher proportion of babies being born weighing less than 2,000g. "Normal" birth weight is considered to be above 2,500g.

Integrating and implementing research across hemispheres

Linda Neuhauser, Dr.P.H. '88, co-principal investigator for Health Research for Action at UC Berkeley, was a visiting professor at the Australian National University (ANU) this past fall. Her visit was hosted by the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health and supported by ANU's vice chancellor's travel grant program. Neuhauser's research and lectures while at ANU focused on cross-disciplinary and translational research and action. She led a class on integrating knowledge for action for 20 doctoral candidates from all areas of the university, including law, ecology, politics education, sociology, physics, humanities, and public health. The vice chancellor's travel grants program supports visits to ANU by academics with exceptional records and the capacity to add value to the university.



Sheldon Margen Public Health Library reopens in new location

Due to the demolition of Warren Hall, the Sheldon Margen Public Health Library relocated in November 2007 to a newly designed space on the ground floor of University Hall.

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State officials select School of Public Health experts to guide biomonitoring program

With four environmental health experts appointed to a nine-person Scientific Guidance Panel, the UC Berkeley School of Public Health is poised to make a strong contribution to the California Environmental Contaminant Biomonitoring Program, which monitors the presence and concentration of designated chemicals in Californians. Professors **Thomas McKone, Ph.D.**, and **Richard Jackson, M.D., M.P.H. '79**, and scientists **Asa Bradman, Ph.D. '97**, and **Michael Wilson, Ph.D. '03, M.P.H. '98**, were all appointed to the panel. The Scientific Guidance Panel assists the Department of Health Services and California Environmental Protections Agency by providing scientific peer reviews and making recommendations regarding the design and implementation of the biomonitoring program that will provide data to help scientists, researchers, public health personnel, and community members explore linkages between chemical exposures and health. The recently created California program is the first of its kind in the nation.

In Mexico, students learn about migration and health

In July 2007, four students from the School of Public Health participated in a week-long program, the Summer Institute on Migration and Health, which took place in Puebla, Mexico. The Berkeley Diversity Research Initiative supported the attendance of Dr.P.H. students **Juan Ibarra, Dr.P.H.(c), M.P.H., M.S.W.**, and **Fatima M. Rodriguez, M.P.H.**, and M.P.H. students **Julia Zeuli** and **Maria (Terry) Minjares**. The students were able to gain analytical and practical tools that they can apply toward addressing migratory public health issues. Workshops and keynotes offered during the week focused on topics such as health promotion among migrant populations, qualitative research in migration and health, and migration and human rights. Students also took a day-long field trip to a nearby community that has prominent migration rates to the United States. They were able to talk to the local mayor, listen to stories by the family members left behind, and observe the impact of the U.S. dollar on the community. Director of Diversity

Abby M. Rincón, M.P.H. '86, also attended the institute.



Left to right: Fatima Rodriguez, Abby Rincon, Terry Minjares, Oscar Lanza, Julia Zeuli, and Juan Ibarra

The Binational Summer Institute on Migration and Health is a program developed by the Health Initiative of the Americas (formerly the California-México Health Initiative), which recently joined the School of Public Health.

Ugandans want peace more than revenge against warlords, says survey

War-fatigued Ugandans would rather live in peace than retaliate against leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel group that forcibly conscripted tens of thousands of women and children, according to a survey released in December 2007 by human rights and international development researchers. The survey found, however, that many Ugandans still want the warlords to be held accountable for atrocities.

The population-based survey was conducted in northern Uganda by researchers from UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center, Tulane University's Payson Center for International Development, and the International Center for Transitional Justice, an organization that seeks accountability for human rights abuses and atrocities. The survey, "When the War Ends," gauges attitudes about peace, justice, and social reconstruction in northern Uganda.

"As the peace process proceeds, the government of Uganda and the international community should heed the priorities expressed by those most affected by the conflict," said Adjunct Professor **Eric Stover**, faculty director of UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center and a coauthor of the report.

Students spread the public health message via news media

Each year in the mass communications and public health course taught by **Lori Dorfman, Dr.P.H. '94**, students learn to publicize their public health messages using the media. They write about public health issues of their choice and submit op-eds and letters to the editor to news outlets.

Typically one or two students get to see their words in print, but the Fall 2007 class was especially successful: The class of 14 students had 9 letters and 2 op-eds published. In *The New York Times*, **Ann Oldervoll** defended San Francisco's health care plan in the name of social justice and good economics. **Deborah Karasek's** letter on financing public education was published by *The New York Times* as well. **Nickie Bazell** and **Katherine Schaff** both had letters published on the same day in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which also published letters from **Rachel Larson**, Karasek, **Juliet Sims**, **Ann Oldervoll**, and **Julia Marcus**. The *Contra Costa Times* published Bazell's op-ed and the *Los Angeles Daily News* published one from Sims. Not to be outshone, Dorfman also had a letter published in *The New York Times*.

Latino traffic safety project enters implementation phase

The UC Berkeley Traffic Safety Center (TSC) is currently conducting the third phase of the Latino Traffic Safety Project, a partnership with Sun Street Centers. The project was formed in 2003 in response to the finding that Latinos experience disproportionate risks of dying or being injured in traffic accidents compared to non-Latino whites. The fact that Latinos will be the majority population in California by 2040 makes it especially critical to address this statistic. During the third phase of the project, the center is working in the field to implement and evaluate the safety recommendations honed in the first two phases. In November 2007, TSC assistant director **Jill Cooper** presented a \$106,500 grant to the Greenfield Prevention and Health Coalition (sponsored by Sun Street Centers) to provide traffic safety interventions to the Greenfield, California, community. Interventions there began in fall of 2007 and continue in 2008.

Stronger cash incentives lead to better health outcomes for poor children

In countries around the world, including the United States, governments are seeking ways to reduce poverty and its impact on children's development. Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs, which aim to improve options for poor families through interventions in health, nutrition, and education, have been adopted as one possible solution. Families enrolled in CCT programs receive cash to spend as they wish in exchange for complying with certain conditions—such as preventive health requirements, nutrition supplementation, education, and monitoring—designed to improve health outcomes and promote positive behavior change.

In 1997, the Mexican government established Oportunidades, one of the first CCT programs. **Lia Fernald, Ph.D., M.B.A.**, assistant professor of public health nutrition, led a study to test whether receiving more money through the Oportunidades program was associated with improvements in child growth, health, and development outcomes. The results show that the household cash transfer component is associated with improvements in height-for-age; several measures of cognitive development and language development; and reductions in BMI-for-age and obesity. The findings suggest that increasing the size of the cash transfer in CCT programs targeted at improving child health could potentially mitigate the effects of poverty on child growth and development and future welfare. The paper has been accepted for publication in *The Lancet*.

Collaborating across universities



This past fall, Assistant Adjunct Professor of Epidemiology **Constance Wang, Ph.D.**, spent a month as a visiting scholar at the University of North Carolina (UNC) School of

Public Health at the invitation of Jay Kaufman, an associate professor of epidemiology at UNC. Notably, Wang helped kick off the fall semester

for the UNC School of Public Health Social Epidemiology/Built Environment Research-in-Progress Group by delivering a talk titled "Bridging the Gap: Complex Descriptions to Advance Epidemiology." She also led several discussion groups. Wang is an alumna of the Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholars Program at UC Berkeley and UCSF.

Study helps identify genetic causes of autoimmune inflammatory disease

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is a chronic autoimmune inflammatory disease that can affect various parts of the body—especially the skin, joints, blood, and kidneys. A substantial genetic contribution to SLE risk is conferred by genes within the major histocompatibility complex (MHC) region on chromosome 6. This region of human genome contains a large number of genes that encode important proteins involved in the immune response. While the human MHC has been shown consistently to be associated with several autoimmune and inflammatory conditions since the 1970s, it has been very difficult to identify disease-specific causal genetic variants due to the strong associations between particular variants located in this region. For many MHC-associated autoimmune conditions, it has only been possible to pinpoint larger association signals. Previous studies of MHC variation in SLE, specifically, have lacked statistical power and genetic resolution to fully characterize MHC influences.

Lisa Barcellos, Ph.D. '96, assistant professor of epidemiology, is conducting a large, comprehensive MHC study in close collaboration with colleagues at UCSF's Division of Rheumatology. The study comprises more than 700 SLE families and 1,600 SLE cases (totaling approximately 3,000 individuals) and uses genetic information from state-of-the-art genotyping of more than 2,200 closely spaced genetic variants (high-resolution) across this region. Initial results provide, for the first time in SLE research, strong evidence for three distinct and independent genetic contributions within the MHC. Barcellos presented findings from the study at the annual American Society of Human Genetics meeting in San Diego in October 2007. The study is funded by the NIH's National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases.

Workshop opens discussion on improved prediction of chemical carcinogenicity



Current methods for assessing hazards of chemicals are widely recognized to be outdated, resulting in an increased burden of disease. To begin to address this problem, **Martyn T. Smith, Ph.D.**, professor

of toxicology, organized a special workshop at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Environmental Mutagen Society, held in Atlanta in October 2007. The workshop, "Predicting Chemical Carcinogenicity, Moving Beyond Batteries," reviewed key developments in the current understanding of cancer biology and their implications. Currently, agencies pick one mode of action for chemicals, but analyses by the workshop group show that chemicals act through multiple pathways, not just one. Looking at these multiple pathways could provide better predictions of cancer risk.

The workshop included presentations by a number of School alumni and faculty. **Martha Sandy, Ph.D. '88, M.P.H. '83**, of the California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, showed that assessment frameworks need to evolve to better reflect biology. **David Eastmond, Ph.D. '87**, professor of cell biology and research toxicologist at UC Riverside, discussed how this evolution may occur through a better understanding of the biology. Associate Adjunct Professor **Luoping Zhang, Ph.D.**, presented her studies using toxicogenomics as biomarkers of cancer risk in humans exposed to toxic chemicals such as benzene, dioxin, and arsenic, and concluded that toxicogenomics could accelerate hazard identification. **Amy D. Kyle, Ph.D. '96, M.P.H. '92**, associate research scientist and lecturer at the School of Public Health, pointed out future directions and implications of these findings for chemical hazard assessment and public policy. 6