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Saint Louis University School of Public Health
Department of Community Health

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Health Equity & Disparities: A Road to Resolution

Racial and ethnic minority communities across the United States suffer from disproportionately higher rates of morbidity and mortality. Recognizing this, Healthy People 2010 has stated that the elimination of these health disparities is a priority. To be successful, focus needs to shift from individual determinants of health to broader community factors.

As a graduate student at Saint Louis University School of Public Health, Ellen Barnidge, PhD, was part of a community-academic partnership whose goal was to address social and economic factors influencing health of the African American community in Pemiscot County, Missouri. This group moved from looking only at key individual determinants of cardiovascular disease – nutrition and physical activity – to the root causes.

Pemiscot County community members identified the lack of African American male role models as one barrier to achieving health. They explained that in Pemiscot County there is insufficient opportunity for education and employment, especially for African American men. As a result, fewer men feel capable of serving as role models in the community. To understand and address this lack of opportunity and its effect on community health, Men on the Move was developed.

As part of Men on the Move, Barnidge's dissertation work focused on how community factors influence access to education and employment and the ultimate effect this has on community health. To frame her dissertation work, Ms. Barnidge used the Sustainable Livelihood framework, developed by the Department for Interna-



tional Development which suggests that all communities have assets (e.g., money, land, social relationships) that influence the development and maintenance of practices and policies. These assets, practices and policies shape the opportunities individuals have to make a living in their community, affecting community health.

Through focus groups, Barnidge and her partners found that to improve community health they must increase the availability and types of local jobs. They recognize that assets, such as education, natural resources, entertainment and recreational facilities, must be developed to attract new business to the area. Further, Pemiscot County needs to increase opportunities for African American leadership to ensure that the practices and policies developed are inclusive and appropriate for the entire community. Building new partnerships with business owners, school administrators, city government, and economic developers is essential.

The partnership is currently working to build a community food system to grow and distribute culturally appropriate, nutritious food in an effort to develop an economic model that increases production and distribution of fruits and vegetables, while increasing jobs in the community.

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Bridging the Gap

Applying evidence-based interventions

Over the past few decades, as the field of public health research has matured, numerous interventions addressing diverse public health problems have been developed, evaluated, and solutions synthesized. However, only a small proportion of these effective interventions get widely adopted in practice settings and reach the ultimate target population. Furthermore, research examining the processes that lead to widespread use of evidence-based interventions is sparse.

Borsika A. Rabin is a recent PhD graduate of Saint Louis University School of Public Health whose doctoral dissertation focused on dissemination and implementation (D&I) research, which has potential for narrowing the gap between existing public health knowledge and its application in the primary prevention of cancer. During her years at SLUSPH, Dr. Rabin not only worked with her mentor, Dr. Ross Brownson, Professor of Epidemiology and Co-Director of the Prevention Research Center in St. Louis, but also participated in a wide variety of other research projects within and outside of the school.

Rabin addressed the issue of D&I research in a number of ways. First, in collaboration with a workgroup, she developed a glossary that provides definitions for key concepts and terms in the field of D&I research in public health. The aim of this glossary was to aid in the development of more standardized and established terminology and to facilitate the communication across different stakeholders. Next, she used two hypothetical D&I case studies to identify challenges that researchers and practitioners may experience when they attempt to conduct D&I studies, and then made recommendations on future research and practice activities. She also conducted a systematic review of D&I studies in the primary prevention of cancer in community settings. Key findings from this review called for: uniform language, studies targeting various populations and settings, and valid and reliable measures. Finally she used empirical data from a study conducted by Dr. Karen Glanz at Emory University to assess the relative contributions of individual and setting level characteristics and treatment group on the implementation of an effective skin cancer prevention intervention. The most noteworthy finding from this multilevel analysis is the role of intervention intensity in the implementation of skin cancer prevention interventions, indicating that more active strategies lead to higher levels of implementation. Rabin was also the member of the Translation and Dissemination (T&D) Task Force at the School of Public Health and worked on the development of a web tool to enhance the planning for dissemination. She was also involved in the initial development of T&D-related competencies for the School.

Rabin recently accepted a Research Coordinator position at the Institute for Health Research at Kaiser Permanente Colorado. She works as the Research Coordinator for the newly formed Cancer Research Network Cancer Communication Research Center funded through the National Cancer Institute.

In the future, she would like to teach and conduct independent research on cancer prevention and care using her skills in epidemiology and D&I research.

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Borsika A. Rabin, PhD.

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Controlling mold in a cost-effective manner



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Kee-Hean Ong, of the Environmental Health Research Laboratory.

Just imagine... it is summer 2008 in St. Louis and as you walk in your door you hear a squish. The rains of the summer have taken a toll and you have a carpet to replace . . . or do you? Questions like this are what PhD candidate Kee-Hean Ong can help you answer. Ong, employed in the Environmental Health Research Laboratory, is finishing his doctoral work at SLU School of Public Health in the Environmental and Occupational Health division of the Department of Community Health. For his dissertation he has been working with his mentor, Dr. Roger Lewis, Associate Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health.

Ong specifically evaluated mold growth over time and removal of mold from wet carpet. In the investigation the fungus *C. sphaerospermum* was placed on a carpet, incubated and then different methods of removal/inactivation were tested. Three different methods of mold removal from the wet carpet were used: 1) high flow hot water extraction, 2) steam vapor and 3) detergent and hot water. What Ong and his colleagues found was that steam vapor had a constant fungal inactivation rate, whereas the other two methods had an inverse relationship with mold concentration. In steam vapor removal, for the steam to be effective the carpet needed at least 12 seconds of steam vapor contact to inactivate at least 95% of the fungus spores, according to the research Ong and his colleagues conducted.

Ong has also been working on two other major projects with his team. The first is an extension of the above described project, but it has been taken one step farther and, instead of just looking at mold, they are also looking at dust mites and dust mite allergens. In this effort, they are working with New Zealand’s AgResearch, a biotechnology research institute. The future public health implications of this project and its extension are that people who are seriously affected by allergens and have so much difficulty living with it could have easier and cheaper means to avoid potential health risks. The steam vapor method of cleaning is fairly quick and affordable, whereas, without this methodology, a carpet could need replacing, adding a financial burden to the health concerns. Likewise, Ong is working with Brett Emo, another SLU SPH doctoral student, and researchers at UCLA to determine new ways to evaluate lead dust clearance. Together they hope to determine more accurate and cost effective ways to qualify clearance for lead after remediation or abatement work – a necessary step in the complex process of making environments free of lead hazards.

As Ong approaches the completion of his PhD, he looks forward to his career in environmental science and, eventually, to teaching. His passion is engaging future scientists in learning and he is willing to go where opportunity takes him. Soon he will be trading his student status for a role in the classroom, encouraging other post baccalaureate students to further endeavors.



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News

Saint Louis University invites applications for several tenure-track Assistant or Associate Professor positions in the School of Public Health.

Biostatistics (2 faculty positions)

Preferred expertise: Bayesian analysis, psychometrics, latent variable analysis, clinical/community trials, longitudinal data analysis and spatial analysis.

Behavioral Science/Health Education

Preferred expertise: Any focus area in social and behavioral sciences, with an emphasis on applied, trans-disciplinary research.

Environmental/Occupational Health

Preferred expertise: Global health, geographic information systems and laboratory-based experience in bioaerosols, microbial disinfection, water filtration, surface cleaning, chemical sensors or heavy metals.

Epidemiology

Preferred expertise: Infectious diseases, genetics, nutrition, pediatric health and injury prevention.

Calendar of Events

FEBRUARY

Feb. 27

Works in Progress Seminar Series:
"Community Benefit"

– presented by Connie Evashwick, PhD, and
Kanak Gautam, PhD

Feb. 28

School of Public Health Multicultural Eve

MARCH

Mar. 9-13 – Spring Break – no classes

Mar. 13 – School of Public Health Open House

Mar. 23-26 – American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) 2009 Congress on Healthcare Leadership in Chicago, IL

APRIL

Apr. 4-11 – National Public Health Week

Check <http://publichealth.slu.edu>
for more information about these events.

We want to hear from YOU!

Contact the Newsletter at:
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