

Urban Transformations

Newsletter of the Department of Health Policy and Management
in the School of Community Health and Policy at Morgan State University

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From the Department Chair

Jonathan B. VanGeest, PhD

Fall is always a time of new beginnings in academia. While this year is no different, there is added excitement on Morgan State's campus related to the arrival of President David Wilson. Within the SCHP and across campus, President Wilson is challenging faculty and students to higher levels of ingenuity, productivity and excellence. His vision for Morgan State University is "Growing the future, leading the world."

In this issue of *Urban Transformations*, we highlight some of the ways the Department is already positioned to respond to Dr. Wilson's challenge. Specifically, we have a number of new initiatives promoting the applica-

tion of informatics (i.e., the systematic application of information, computer science and technology) to inform evidence-based solutions for eliminating racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care. One of these initiatives is the *Center for Health Informatics, Planning and Policy (CHIPP)* which we are developing with funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (see story). CHIPP is interdisciplinary and will seek to incorporate expertise from across the University in formulating new and innovative urban planning and policy answers.

We have also continued to grow existing programs, including the National Minority Male Health Project (NMMHP). This year, NMMHP hosted its third *Project AHEAD* summer program under the direction of Dr. Anita Hawkins (see story). The NMMHP remains a signature project of the *(Continued page 2)*



From the Department Chair (continued):

SCHP and the DHPM, representing the best of Morgan State's steadfast commitment to meeting the needs of the communities we serve. Numerous other initiatives are also underway within the Department. This fall SCHP admitted its largest ever MPH and DrPH cohorts in the Public Health Program. These new students bring excitement and diversity to the Program, as they come from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences; helping us fulfill our mission of preparing public health professionals equipped to address the health needs of minorities in our state and across the nation.

I encourage you to learn more about the Department of Health Policy and Management at Morgan State University. I am sure you will agree that the DHPM is developing an impressive array of new initiatives, achieving new outcomes in areas of faculty scholarship, and maintaining our commitment to community engagement. In all areas we strive for excellence. Join us in these efforts by becoming a part of our future!



New Center

News Release

For Immediate Release
Sept. 15, 2010

New Morgan State University Initiative Uses Information Science and Informatics to Address Health Disparities

BALTIMORE – A new interdisciplinary informatics initiative by Morgan State University (MSU) aims to leverage expertise from across disciplines to address the complex and often intractable issues impacting the health of urban underserved communities in the city of Baltimore, the state of Maryland and the nation. Morgan's new **Center for Health Informatics, Planning and Policy (CHIPP)** will advance urban planning, counseling and policy solutions to health problems that affect these target communities disproportionately. The center's work will stress the application of interdisciplinary informatics (i.e., information science and technology) to evidence-based planning and policy solutions.

"It [CHIPP] helps position MSU to reach our goal of becoming one of the most exciting urban research universities in the nation. It also strengthens the University's dedication to instructional innovation and student success, as well as our commitment to the communities we serve as the state's designated urban academic institution." - MSU President Dr. David Wilson

The development of CHIPP has been led by a team of faculty experts in health policy (Jonathan VanGeest, Ph.D., Department of Health Policy and Management, School of Community Health and Policy), informatics (Timothy Akers, Ph.D., School of Computer, Mathematical and Natural Sciences), behavioral and counseling

sciences (Anna McPhatter, Ph.D. and Melissa Littlefield, Ph.D., School of Social Work), and urban planning and design (Mary Anne Akers, Ph.D., School of Architecture and Planning). The initiative is supported by funding from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

CHIPP will actively engage faculty researchers with diverse training from across the MSU campus community to begin identifying important community needs that are time-sensitive and data-rich. The center will also equip Morgan's students with new and innovative uses of data that can aid in community-driven policy and programmatic decision-making. In doing so, the center will develop models that can be used by others in promoting community and mental health, urban design, and technology solutions that are replicable across communities.

The center's work will stress the application of best practices designed to empower communities and promote lasting solutions, including:

- **Community-based partnerships:** collaborating with communities in Baltimore and across the state in identifying critical data needs and solutions;
- **Translational research:** Translating and applying best practices from across different disciplines to advance real sol-

utions and inform community development;

- **Interdisciplinary approaches:** working across disciplines to more fully address the complexity of issues facing our urban underserved communities today;
- **Use of the science of informatics:** leveraging the power of data and information to promote effective community advocacy, technological innovation and policy formation.

To accomplish its goals, the center will draw on expertise from a wide range of disciplines, such as public health, urban planning, social work, environmental sciences, sociology and computer and information sciences, among others. CHIPP will partner with other academic and community-based institutions, as well as governments, philanthropic organizations and corporations in Maryland, the nation and abroad.

“The University is extremely pleased with this new initiative,” said Morgan State University President David Wilson. “It helps position MSU to reach our goal of becoming one of the most exciting urban research universities in the nation. It also strengthens the University’s dedication to instructional innovation and student success, as well as our commitment to the communities we serve as the state’s designated urban academic institution.”

ABOUT MORGAN

Morgan State University, in Baltimore, MD, is a Carnegie classified doctoral research institution that has served the community with distinction and

met the educational needs of an increasingly diverse society for more than 140 years. One of the nation’s premier Historically Black Colleges and Universities and designated as Maryland’s Public Urban University, Morgan plays a prominent role in higher education in Maryland and in ensuring its educational future and economic development. More information is available on our website at www.morgan.edu.

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Public Health Informatics

Timothy A. Akers, MS, PhD

Where does public health fit in a world weighed down with mountains of data and information? The answer lies in developing a public health awareness of a critical area where students, practitioners, clinicians, and academics no longer have the luxury of ignoring – that world is “informatics”. Informatics is a science and a discipline, a process and a product. Over the past 15 years, with the advent of vast data storage warehousing and new complex computational algorithms, what was once a silo of health data has now been

transformed to a point where data systems are becoming more readily linked. The National Science Foundation provides a broad perspective by stressing that “informatics involves making innovative use of existing quantitative tools to synthesize and integrate existing, often heterogeneous, types of data to answer emerging and historically challenging questions...”

From a public health point of view, “informatics” has been described as the systematic application of information and computer science and technology to public health practice, research, and learning (Yasnoff et al, 2000). Public health informatics draws upon a complex understanding of programming standards, classification schemas, and coding systems. In this manner, students of public health can embrace the richness of “public health informatics” by systemically examining interactions across the many tools of public health, including understanding the nature and logic of public health surveillance systems, (bio)statistical techniques and models, research methods, interdisciplinary interactions, epidemiology, data coding, modeling, classifying variables, etc. Once these are understood, students can advance into different dimensions or career fields around this occupational rich environment.

While there are many different ways of describing, understanding, and teaching *informatics*, a student or practitioner’s best starting point is to examine the “Big Picture” and see how *informatics* fits within their ability to more effectively use and manage

complex public or clinical health data systems. Through informatics, the end-users of data are more likely to be placed in a competitive advantage over their contemporaries that may not fully understand or embrace how data can be transformed to inform evidence-based policy and practice.

Project AHEAD 2010

In 2008, under the direction of Dr. Anita Smith Hawkins, the National Minority Male Health Project (NMMHP) piloted a two-week summer youth and fitness program at Morgan State University for male youth ages 10 - 15. Known as Project AHEAD (Approaches to Healthy Exercise and Diet), the program quickly became an official part of the NMMHP and is now being implemented at five HBCUs under its umbrella.

To accommodate growth in the program, and the desires of participants and their parents to have a program experience lasting longer than two weeks, the NMMHP collaborated with local neighborhood faith-based organizations to integrate the Project AHEAD curriculum into existing summer programs. This was realized with the opening of the Amazing Grace Health and Fitness Camp at All Saints Lutheran Church, located less than a quarter mile from the Morgan State campus. Amazing Grace operated for six weeks commen-

cing on June 28, 2010 and lasting through August 6, 2010. There were 75 participants ranging in age from 4 – 15 years, divided into three age groups: age 4– 6; age 7 - 11; and age 12 -15.



The Project AHEAD curriculum includes age-appropriate lectures and activities on: How The Body Works; Fruits and Vegetables; Whole Grains; Cutting Back on Fats and Added Sugars; Bringing the Grocery Store to Class; Physical Activity; Building Better Bones; Being Safe and Preventing Injury; Making Smart Choices; Conflict Resolution; Nutrition Around the World; Food Preparation; and Basic Computer. In addition to the learning modules on fitness, the participants engaged in a number of activities to promote movement: African drumming; music (singing and piano); dance (Hip Hop); various health and fitness games; swimming; and yoga. The campers were also kept engaged with movies and field trips once a week.

The summer program concluded with an awards ceremony to which parents were invited. Attendance was standing room only. Parents viewed a video of classroom activities and field trips and the youth performed dance,



African drumming and singing. Many campers were presented with awards for learning the body systems, body parts, and food groups. Refreshments included a fruit parfait which the campers had prepared.

In an effort to promote healthy behavior and to reinforce healthy eating and exercise, the participants and their families will be invited to attend follow-up activities throughout the year. The first of these was held on Saturday, September 18, 2010. Participants at that event did arts and crafts, played a variety of games, and enjoyed healthy snacks.

Chemical Emergencies Workgroup

After four 4 public meetings (one held at MSU-SCHP) and numerous phone conferences over the last year, the Chemical Emergencies Workgroup chaired by Dr. **Andrea Kidd Taylor** has completed its draft report for the *National Conversation on Public Health and Chemical Exposures*. The collaborative project was supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR). The vision of the *National Conversation* is for chemicals to be used and managed in ways that are safe and healthy for all people. The goal of the *National Conversation* is to develop an action agenda with recommendations that are concise and achievable, and can strengthen the efforts of government agencies and other organizations to protect the public from harmful chemical exposures.

The Chemical Emergencies Workgroup report is one of six reports now posted on Resolve's website for public comment (www.resolve.org/nationalconversation). After an extensive review process, the workgroups, consisting of approximately 30 scientists, community activists, and representatives from local and national government, were created in August 2009 to research and make recommendations on the following cross-cutting public health and chemical exposure issues: 1.) Monitoring; 2.) Scientific Understanding; 3.) Policies and Practices; 4.) Chemical Emergencies; 5.) Serving Commu-

ities; and 6.) Education and Communication. Utilizing the workgroup reports and additional inputs from members of the public who choose to participate in Web dialogues and community conversations, the action agenda will be authored by the *National Conversation Leadership Council* of which Dr. Taylor is also a member. Current plans are to publish and release the *National Conversation's* action agenda and the final workgroup reports in January 2011.

2010 APHA

As highlighted in previous editions, the 138th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) will take place in Denver, Colorado, November 6-10, 2010. This year's meeting theme is **Social Justice: A Public Health Imperative**. Information on the 2010 Annual Meeting is available online at: <http://www.apha.org/meetings>.

At this year's meeting, the DHPM will be represented by a number of faculty and students presenting their work, including:

L. Edwards & A. Hawkins. "Till death do us part: Life experiences of married HIV-positive women" (214958/Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2010)

A. Hawkins et al. "Community academic education partnerships: Training socially responsible public health leaders." (227468/Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010)

A.M. O'Keefe, Y. Aoki, & J. Bishop. "Black, White and Hispanic pregnancies: Clues to the social etiology of low birth weight and infant mortality." (216613/Monday Nov. 8, 2010)

O. Olorunnishola, A. Kidd Taylor, & L. Byrd. "Occupational injuries and illnesses in the solid

waste industry: A call for action." (229160/Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010)

J. Sligh. "Deamonte Driver Dental Project provides social justice for the underserved: A community-based model." (229152/Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2010)

T.A. Akers, K. Daniels, S. Smith & J. VanGeest. "Where two worlds collide: A social justice imperative for youth gang violence prevention through an epidemiological criminology disparities framework." (4023.0/Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010) (see box)

J. VanGeest (session co-organizer/moderator) "Epidemiology Criminology: A new paradigm promoting innovative practice and policy-based solutions for social justice" (4091.0/Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010) (see box)

For additional information regarding MSU-SCHP activities at the 2010 APHA Annual Meeting, contact Dr. Eduardo Velasco, SCHP Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs.

APHA Invited Sessions

For the third year in a row, faculty in the DHPM will be collaborating with the APHA Epidemiology Section to organize sessions on *Epidemiological Criminology*.

Session 4023.0 (Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010: 8:30 AM). ***Epidemiological Criminology: An Emerging Framework to Address Social Justice as a Public Health Imperative***

Session 4091.0 (Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2010: 10:30 AM). ***Epidemiological Criminology: A New Paradigm Promoting Innovative Practice and Policy-Based Solutions for Social Justice***

Diversity Rx Update

The *National Diversity Rx Conference on Quality Health Care for Culturally Diverse Populations* is fast approaching! The meeting will be held October 18-21 in Baltimore, MD and will highlight state and national policy initiatives and their implications for improving care for diverse patients and communities. It will also feature cutting edge initiatives in the areas of language access, cultural competence, and disparities reduction.

DHPM faculty will present at the Diversity Rx Conference on the following topics:

J. VanGeest & V. Welch. "Exploring the business and clinical cases for screening for health literacy in primary care: A case study using the NVS."

Y. Aoki. "Potential need for race-specific diagnostic criteria and healthcare delivery for thyroid hormone abnormalities."

Conference and registration information are available at the Diversity Rx Conference website: www.diversityconference.org. SCHP students and alumni are encouraged to attend.

For more information on SCHP Diversity Rx activities, please contact conference liaison Dr. Ian Lindong at 443-885-3127 or ianlindong@gmail.com.

Department Publications & Presentations

PUBLICATIONS:

Hawkins A, O'Keefe AM, James X. (2010). Healthcare access and utilization among ex-offenders in Baltimore: Implications for policy. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, 21:649-65.

Sydnor K, **Hawkins A,** Edwards L. (2010). Expanding research opportunities: The fit between HBCUs and CBPR. *Journal of Negro Education*, 79:79-86.

Olorunnishola O, **Kidd Taylor A,** Byrd L. (2010). Occupational injuries and illnesses in the solid waste industry: A call for action. *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health*, 20:211-23.

Joubert A, **Kidd Taylor A,** Christopher G, et al. (2010). Complementary and alternative medical practice: Self-care preferred versus practitioner based care among patients with asthma. *Journal of the National Medical Association*, 102:562-9.

VanGeest JB, Welch VL, Weiner SJ. (2010). Patients' perceptions of screening for health literacy: Reactions to the Newest Vital Sign. *Journal of Health Communication*, 15:402-12.

PRESENTATIONS:

VanGeest, JB, Ball C. *Developing and Delivering Online Education Initiatives:* Faculty Institute, Morgan State University, Baltimore, MD.

Hawkins, A. *Beauty is Only Skin Deep: The Mirror's Reflection.* 5th Annual AAHMI Research to Practice Conference, Hampton University, Hampton, VA.

Department "Briefs"

Drs. **Yutaka Aoki, Anita Hawkins, Anne Marie O'Keefe, Andrea Taylor,** and **Jonathan VanGeest** will be presenting at the upcoming 138th Annual Meeting of the American Public Health Association (APHA) in Denver, Colorado, November 6-10, 2010. Information on the 2010 Annual Meeting is available online at: <http://www.apha.org/meetings>.

Drs. **Yutaka Aoki** and **Jonathan VanGeest** will be presenting at the upcoming *Diversity Rx* Conference, October 18-21 in Baltimore. The conference will highlight state and national policy initiatives and their implications for improving care for diverse patients and communities. It will also feature cutting edge initiatives in the areas of language access, cultural competence, and disparities reduction. Conference information is available at: www.diversityconference.org.

Continuing cross-departmental collaborative efforts Drs. **Anita Hawkins** (HPM) and Kim Sydnor (Department of Behavioral Health Sciences) have received additional funds from the Administrative Office of the Courts, State of Maryland Judiciary to continue evaluation activities focused on mental health courts and to expand efforts to examine the juvenile justice system. The additional funds will cover work through 2013. The School of Community Health and Policy has established its expertise in investigating the intersection of public health and the judiciary.

About the Department

The **Department of Health Policy and Management** at MSU-SCHP includes two content areas: 1) Health Policy and Management and 2) Environmental and Occupational Health. Graduates of the Department are prepared to assume leadership roles in designing and implementing effective policies and programs to eliminate health disparities, including initiatives addressing community and environmental factors impacting urban underserved populations and people of color.

For more information about the Department, please call the School of Community Health and Policy at 443-885-3238.

Our faculty and Staff:

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Save the Date!

APHA IN DENVER



Visit the MSU School of Community Health and Policy's booth at the APHA's Public Health Expo will be held in Denver from November 6-10, 2010. (Show Floor/Exhibit Dates are November 7-10, 2010) in the Colorado Convention Center. The Public Health Expo is the largest and most comprehensive public health exhibit featuring more than 700 booths of information, state-of-the-art products, and services geared towards public health professionals.

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