



Urban Transformations

Newsletter of the Department of Health Policy & Management
School of Community Health & Policy

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HIGHLIGHTS

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From the Department Chair

Jonathan B. VanGeest, PhD

The name of our new newsletter, *Urban Transformations*, reflects a goal of both our Department and the Morgan State University School of Community Health & Policy (MSU-SCHP). As part of Maryland's designated **public urban university**, MSU-SCHP is uniquely positioned to affect positive change in urban communities throughout Baltimore and the region. The Department of Health Policy & Management is embracing this opportunity, seeking to establish itself as a "go-to" resource on policy issues impacting urban underserved communities and people of color.



Standing (L-R): Drs. Sheikhattari, Taylor, VanGeest. Sitting (L-R): Drs. Hawkins, Aoki, O'Keefe

This is an exciting time to be affiliated with the Department and the School. As a former Senior Scientist in Medicine and Public Health at the American Medical Association (AMA) and Director of the AMA's Health Disparities Program, I have seen communities impacted and lives changed through the effective use of public

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Our New Location

Little Cigars

Anne M. O'Keefe, PhD, JD

No issue is as important to public health as tobacco use, the nation's leading preventable killer. While smoking prevalence in the state is at a historic low (19%), in some inner-city neighborhoods in Baltimore, more than 60% of young adults report being smokers.

2007 was a banner year in Maryland tobacco control policy. Bills were enacted mandating fire-safe cigarettes, banning smoking in almost all indoor public places and workplaces, and doubling the state tax on cigarettes to \$2 per pack. Increasing the price of cigarettes is the most effective deterrent of smoking, especially among youth and other price sensitive groups. However, because "little cigars" are not classified as cigarettes, they cost substantially less and escape prohibitions on single sales, despite being just as deadly and addictive. Single sales are a particular problem in Baltimore, where nearly 77% of African American smokers aged 18-24 years report

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dean: Allan S. Noonan, MD, PhD
Chair: Jonathan B. VanGeest, PhD

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Allan S. Noonan,
MD, MPH
SCHP Dean

health policy and advocacy. Under the overall direction of **Dr. Allan S. Noonan**, SCHP Dean and former Assistant U.S. Surgeon General, the Department is actively engaging the Baltimore community and pushing ahead at all levels to develop policies and resources supporting the elimination of health disparities due to race, ethnicity, poverty, and social injustice.

Department faculty offer a wide range of professional expertise and are actively involved in research and service activities in the city, state, region, and nation. Current projects include: an evaluation of the Mental Health Courts in Harford and Baltimore counties; a partnership with Morehouse School of Medicine on a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation-funded study to improve care for patients with low health literacy; and a multi-faceted Minority Male Health Project. Future editions of this newsletter will highlight these and other new projects, as well as policy issues facing urban populations and people of color in Baltimore and the state, to inform readers about issues impacting their lives.

“Graduates of the Department are prepared to assume leadership roles in designing and implementing effective policies to eliminate health disparities.”

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 to eliminate health disparities, including initiatives addressing environmental factors impacting urban underserved populations and people of color.

For more information on the Department, please call the School of Community Health & Policy at 443-885-3238 or visit the School’s website at <http://schp.morgan.edu/>.

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buying “loosies” on the street.



The Department of Health Policy and Management has worked with the Baltimore City Health Department and the University of Maryland Center for Tobacco Regulation in supporting House Bill 617, which would tax little cigars (e.g., Winchesters) at the same rate as cigarettes, and House Bill 609, which would prohibit the sale or distribution of small cigars in packages of less than 5. Both bills are sponsored by Delegate Shawn Tarrant of Baltimore City. Testimony was submitted for the February 25th hearing on these bills; the legislature has until the April 10th adjournment to pass them into law.

City Health Department Report: “Black and Mild in Baltimore City,” available at http://www.baltimorehealth.org/info/2007_10_09_blackmilds.pdf



Dr. Payam
Sheikhattari

Faculty Highlight – Payam Sheikhattari

Dr. Payam Sheikhattari is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Health Policy & Management, with research interests in the areas of mental health, health promotion, and community-based participatory research. He has worked in the Southwest Baltimore Community in the areas of tobacco use, drug misuse, and obesity since 2006, supported, in part, by MSU's **Center for Health Disparities Solutions**. Specifically, Dr. Sheikhattari has collaborated with community

organizations, including the People's Community Health Centers at Open Gates, to coordinate a Mini Grants program, in which six local institutions in Southwest Baltimore were funded by the Center to implement health promotion projects within their communities. He has also contributed to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the 2007 **Southwest Baltimore Community Health Summit**, where he presented findings of a local study to community participants. Current projects include a collaborative R24 grant proposal to reduce tobacco use among urban residents, now under review at the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities, and preparation of a manuscript addressing the unique barriers to utilization of cessation programs in Southwest Baltimore. Lastly, he continues to help build partnerships between Southwest Baltimore and MSU to effectively address racial and ethnic health disparities.

Recent Department Publications

Aoki Y, Belin RM, Clickner R, Jeffries R, et al. Serum TSH and total T4 in the United States population and their association with participant characteristics: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES 1999-2002). *Thyroid*. 2007;17:1211-23.

VanGeest JB, Johnson TP, Welch VL. Methodologies for improving response rates in surveys of physicians: A systematic review. *Evaluation and the Health Professions*. 2007; 30(4): 303-21.

Schwartzberg JG, Cowett A, **VanGeest J**, Wolf MS. Communication techniques for patients with low health literacy: A survey of physicians, nurses, and pharmacists. *American Journal of Health Behavior*. 2007;31:S96-104.

VanGeest JB, Cummins DS. "International Research Ethics." In Global Healthcare Issues and Policies, [edited] by CS Holtz. Boston, MA: Jones and Bartlet Publishers, 2007.



Dr. Anita
Hawkins

Department "Briefs"

Dr. **Anita Hawkins** co-authored a chapter on **HIV, STD and Teen Pregnancy Prevention** in Fit, Healthy, and Ready to Learn: A School Health Policy Guide, published by the National Association of State Boards of Education.

Dr. **Andrea Taylor** was elected to the Executive Board of the American Public Health Association.

Dr. **Andrea Taylor** is working with the **Coalition to End Childhood Lead Poisoning** to assess environmental interventions associated with their Department of Housing and Community Development (HUD)-funded project to improve the health of children diagnosed with asthma.

Dr. **Anne M. O'Keefe** attended the February launch of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's **Commission to Build a Healthier America**.

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Department of Health Policy & Management, Morgan State University, 1700 E. Cold Spring Lane, Portage Campus, Baltimore, MD 21251. If you are alumni, we would also welcome information on your professional accomplishments which we would feature on our Department webpage.