

Eliminating Health Disparities: UMD Center Serves as National Model

Compared to whites, African Americans die at higher rates from heart disease, HIV/AIDS, diabetes and eight other leading causes of death in Maryland. Across the nation, they and other racial and ethnic minorities disproportionately lack access to and experience discrimination when seeking quality health care, even as health has improved for Americans overall.

Launched in 2010, the Maryland Center for Health Equity (M-CHE), based in the School of Public Health (SPH), is working to change these trends. Center Director **Stephen B. Thomas**, professor of health services administration, and his team are addressing a wide array of issues. "The center has accomplished so much in just two years," says SPH Dean **Jane E. Clark**. "Dr. Thomas and his team have created a framework for eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities that involves community engagement, research, training and the development of healthy public policy that can be emulated across the country."

M-CHE has forged strong connections with communities on and off campus, helped shape state policies and gained national recognition for its model. Named a National Institutes of Health (NIH) Center of Excellence on Race, Ethnicity and Health Disparities Research, it received \$5.9 million from the NIH-National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities in 2012.

"One of the university's main goals is to serve the state and improve the lives of its residents through applied research," says Associate Vice President for Research **Ken Gertz**. "The Maryland Center for Health Equity is a strong example of these efforts."

Working locally is key, Thomas says.

"Many universities cast shadows on neighborhoods where people suffer from conditions that can be solved by their scientific expertise,"

he says. "Our credibility is directly related to ensuring people benefit from our research."

In Prince George's County, M-CHE created Health Advocates In-Reach and Research (HAIR), a network of African-American barbershops and salons where health professionals and researchers can engage the community in a trusted setting. This gives community members a greater voice and helps researchers understand how discrimination and historical scientific mistreatment keep African Americans and Latinos from participating in clinical trials.

On the state level, the M-CHE team is working with the governor's administration to make Maryland a national model for implementing health-care reform. In 2009, an estimated 14 percent of Maryland's non-elderly population did not have health insurance, according to the Maryland Health Care Commission. Thomas is advising the Maryland Health



Barbershop customers receive medical evaluations as part of the Health Advocates In-Reach and Research (HAIR) project in Prince George's County.

Benefit Exchange, which is creating a new navigational infrastructure to guide those outside the system in selecting the best insurance for them. The exchange is on schedule to be ready when key portions of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act are implemented in 2014.

Thomas and his team also contributed to the Maryland Cost and Quality Council's Health Disparity Report that led to the Maryland Health Improvement and Disparities Reduction Act of 2012. This new law provides incentives for health-care providers to go into medically underserved areas and combat, in particular, disparities in hypertension, diabetes and asthma.

M-CHE uses an interdisciplinary approach to health equity, working with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, the School of Public Policy, the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center and more, as well as the University of Maryland, Baltimore.

The center places particular emphasis on working with students and the next generation of medical and public health professionals. It trains these groups to confront their biases to deliver better health care and become more ethical researchers.

Health promotion and disease prevention is the ultimate goal. "It's about reaching people before they get sick, where they live, work, play and worship," Thomas says.

Health Disparities In Maryland

- **In 2010, 45.3% of the Maryland population was a racial or ethnic minority. Prince George's County is 85% racial minority.**
- **11 of the top 15 causes of death show a mortality disparity between African Americans and whites**
- **African Americans are nearly 11 times more likely to die from HIV/AIDS than whites.**
- **African Americans are nearly three times more likely to die in infancy than whites.**
- **Latinos are five times less likely to have health insurance than whites.**

Source: Maryland Chart Book of Minority Health and Health Disparities Data 2012

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National Science Foundation Switching to New Grants Management System

The National Science Foundation moved to a new portal for reporting projects on March 18. **Research.gov**, which is more intuitive and easier to navigate than **FastLane**, will eventually replace it for all research-related information and grants management services.

The Office of Research Administration has begun contacting researchers directly with new login protocols and information when reports are due. **Researchers with an active account can use their FastLane login and password on the new site.**

Research.gov will eventually become the portal for other federal agencies, including NASA and the Department of Agriculture.

For more information, contact the Office of Research Administration at oraera@umd.edu or visit research.gov.



University Cork College Administrators Visit Campus, Discuss Collaborations

Two leading administrators from University Cork College (UCC) in Ireland visited Maryland in April to discuss new research partnerships as part of the University of Maryland's commitment to global exchange for students, faculty and staff.

"The university is expanding its reach and exploring new areas of research collaboration around the world," says Vice President and Chief Research Officer **Patrick O'Shea**. "University Cork College's work is very complementary to ours at the University of Maryland."

Anita Maguire, vice president for research and innovation, and **David O'Connell**, director of research support services, were briefed on topics including energy, food safety, bioengineering and big data research. They also visited the University of Maryland, Baltimore's medical and pharmacy schools and the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center in Annapolis.

The UCC partnership was formalized in August 2012, when O'Shea, an alumnus of UCC, visited Cork with a UMD delegation.

The Irish government recently pledged nearly \$400 million to new research centers across Ireland. UCC, as one of the three main research universities in the nation, will receive the majority of the funding to conduct work in areas such as marine renewable energy, functional foods, photonics and big data.



From left: David O'Connell, Ken Gertz, Anita Maguire and Patrick O'Shea in Annapolis.

We introduce you to new faculty and research scientists in the Maryland research community.



Amy Karlsson is an assistant professor of chemical engineering. Her research seeks to enhance the understanding of fungal disease and develop tools to diagnose it, as well as to design antifungal drugs through protein engineering.



Margrét Bjarnadóttir is an assistant professor of management science and statistics. She specializes in operations research methods using large-scale data, including drug surveillance and practice patterns in health care.



Jerome Dugan is an assistant professor of public policy. His research focuses on managed care organizations, health disparities and health-care regulation.



Thurka Sangaramoorthy is an assistant professor of anthropology. She analyzes how global health policies regarding sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention impact vulnerable groups such as racial and ethnic minorities and migrant populations.



Richard Shin is an associate professor of education. The goal of his research is to improve counseling services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer individuals of color.

Business Professor Works to Improve FAA, Airline Communication

A University of Maryland-led consortium of schools is identifying ways for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and airlines to work together to improve safety, increase capacity, cut costs and streamline performance.



Michael Ball

“Our goal is to develop a more collaborative approach between the FAA and airlines, particularly in the way the FAA manages air traffic on a daily basis,” says **Michael Ball**, co-director of the National Center of Excellence for Aviation Operations Research. He is the Dean’s Chair in Management Science in the Robert H. Smith School of Business and holds a joint appointment in the Institute for Systems Research.

Ball and his team are researching how airlines can save fuel and money. Instead of having flights go into holding patterns around airports while waiting to land, they are working on a way for the FAA to notify airlines earlier of potential congestion—around 500 miles from the destination—so the plane can be slowed gradually and waste virtually no gas. If several flights will be affected, earlier notice can give airlines the flexibility to decide which flight or flights should be slowed, based on the number of connecting passengers or other factors.

Ball works with an interdisciplinary group of students on these projects, including those from business, math and economics.



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FACULTY AWARDS & HONORS



BRIAN D. VOSS, vice president and chief information officer, was named the first EDUCAUSE Presidential Fellow. EDUCAUSE is an association of higher education information technology (IT) professionals. Voss, who has more than 30 years of IT experience, will lead a new initiative focused on reducing costs in the administrative use of information technology.



Biology Professor **BILL JEFFERY** was awarded the Alexander Kowalevsky medal from the St. Petersburg Society of Naturalists, given to scientists who have made notable contributions to evolutionary morphology and embryology. He studies the evolution of development through animals like the *Astyanax mexicanus*, a blind and de-pigmented cavefish.



JUNE HARGROVE, professor of art history, received the Distinguished Teaching of Art History Award from the College Art Association. She also received the Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et Lettres award for her scholarship in French art and culture.

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