The Center for Health Policy Welcomes Growth in 2008

All in all, 2008 proved to be a very successful year for the Center for Health Policy. The Center increased its communication, research, and service efforts in a variety of health policy areas. For example, the Center hosted its most well attended annual health policy summit to date. Also in 2008, CHP established the Missouri Health Policy Forum which convenes key stakeholder and policymakers from around the state to participate in an open dialogue regarding key health policy issues and potential health care reform on the horizon.

Currently, the Center for Health Policy has numerous contracts and grant awards focused on improving the health of Missourians through research, service, and policy initiatives. The specific issues include: health literacy, health equity, childhood obesity, MO HealthNet quality improvement, and health insurance access. Over the last eight years of the Center’s existence, the amount of grants and contracts has increased exponentially. This increase reflects CHP’s growing influence in state health policy affairs. The result of state recognition along with the flexible organizational structure helps the Center broaden its scope and examine health policy issues as they emerge.

In addition to new grant awards and contracts, the CHP has continued its assistance in establishing a statewide Missouri Telehealth Interpretation Project. This system will take advantage of the state’s expansive telehealth system and provide in-person access to a certified health interpreter for patients in clinics and hospitals who do not have access to bilingual staff or services. This resource is extremely valuable to those living in rural areas and can provide 24/7 interpretation services in nearly 25 languages.

The Center for Health Policy in collaboration with the Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis also completed several studies focused on the Missouri Medicaid population, including analysis of the impact 2006 MO HealthNet reform had on health outcomes and patient and provider satisfaction. In addition we provided Missouri data on atypical use of antipsychotics among Medicaid children for the AHRQ national data collection project; and are providing external evaluation and/or assistance to MO HealthNet’s Chronic Care Improvement Program, Money Follows the Person.
READ Grant and its Leader

emphasis in health promotion and disease prevention and working as a graduate research assistant for the Center for Health Policy (CHP). Handera began working for the Center during the winter semester of 2007 contributing to the foundational groundwork of the Health Literacy Missouri (HLM) initiative.

In December 2007, Handera and two additional graduate research assistants (GRA) from the CHP, traveled to Saint Louis University for a one-day training session to familiarize themselves with the process of formally interviewing people regarding their knowledge of health literacy while being compliant with confidentiality and Institutional Review Board provisions. The training Handera received would allow the team to interview local health literacy experts, and collect data on their perceptions to be analyzed and interpreted for the HLM initiative. Inspired by this component of the HLM project, the three GRAs applied for a $2,000 (Research Enrichment And Dissemination [READ]) grant offered through the University of Missouri’s Interdisciplinary Center for Aging.

The project, titled “Interdisciplinary Assessment of Health Literacy Needs Among the Elderly” is intended to expand upon the information gathered from the initial Center on Aging’s READ initiative. Handera’s approach to target the elderly for this particular needs assessment was selected for several of reasons. First, at the time of application, Chris was enrolled in a ‘topics in aging’ course, so he was familiar with the complex health issues facing Missouri’s seniors. Second, he had learned through HLM that the elderly population was at a higher risk of having lower levels of health literacy which adversely affects their health outcomes.

The proposal included background information and documents the realities of low health literacy among the elderly and how it is likely to disproportionally affect their longevity and quality of life. The study includes key informant interviews with twenty leading health care providers in Missouri serving the geriatric population regarding their knowledge of health literacy. Handera and his colleagues hope to gain a better understanding regarding what resources are currently being utilized by the physician, their staff and their patients and identify effective solutions for addressing low literacy among seniors. Ultimately, the proposal was accepted and Handera and his colleagues were awarded the funding to conduct the two-year study. The project began in the fall of 2008, as health care providers and educators were identified to interview. Handera is excited about the impact the analysis will provide, “being awarded the READ grant is an excellent experience for us. In addition to helping us to grow professionally, the grant offers the opportunity to improve the lives of older adults in Missouri. We look forward to completing the study and sharing our findings.”

6th Annual Health Policy Summit Achieved Success!

More than 250 local and state policymakers, educators, researchers and health professionals gathered on Halloween to participate in the Center for Health Policy’s 6th Annual Health Policy Summit. With the attendance doubling that of last year’s conference, it is obvious our attempts at highlighting significant health policy issues within the state of Missouri are not going unnoticed. Throughout the day, dynamic, spirited, and enthusiastic keynote speakers and local panelists engaged the audience and brought to light two growing health policy concerns facing the future of Missouri and the nation: health literacy and childhood obesity.

The morning session began with Andrew Pleasant, PhD. Currently an assistant professor at Rutgers University in the Department of Human Ecology and the Extension Department of Family and Community Health Sciences, he is a co-author of "Advancing Health Literacy: A Framework for Understanding and Action". His presentation offered background of health literacy fundamentals. Pleasant answered pressing questions with humor while stressing health literacy’s importance in the health care setting and implications for public health. He identified key incentives as to why improving health literacy is imperative to health care reform. As he pointed out, improving levels of health literacy decrease health care costs by reducing duplication and waste while
simultaneously improving the satisfaction with the health care experience and quality of care through improved health outcomes.

A panel of local health literacy experts followed Pleasant’s discussion: Dr. Arthur Culbert, Senior Advisor for Missouri Foundation for Health; Dr. David Fleming, University of Missouri Health Care; Lisa West, Senior Health Coach, St. Louis Integrated Health Networks; and Gaby Flores, Director of Language Interpretation Services, Truman Medical Services. Each panelist described their relationship with health literacy and its perceived relevance for their work before opening the panel up for audience questions. Dr. Culbert and Dr. Fleming conveyed the theoretical significance of health literacy for Missouri while West and Flores discussed the impacts increasing levels of health literacy have in hospital and clinic settings.

During the lunch break, T.R. Reid led a captivating dialogue based on the content of his recent PBS documentary entitled *Sick around the World*. Reid is a correspondent for the *Washington Post*, author of numerous books and documentaries and provides commentaries for National Public Radio. Reid explained why the United States ranks 37th in the world for highest health care costs, quality and coverage. Enhanced by personal anecdotes of his experiences living abroad, Reid defined socialized medicine in the context of 5 countries (UK, Taiwan, Japan, Switzerland and Germany) and highlighted the differences between each and the private health care system of the US. His overall message was that citizens of the US could obtain national health care coverage through a variety of methods. Reid’s sentiment challenged the audience to understand how we, as American citizens, can place a monetary value on health care, when many countries we compete against in the global economy consider it a public commodity from which every citizen can benefit.

Morgan Spurlock

Morgan Spurlock provided the childhood obesity keynote address. Spurlock is internationally known for his documentary, *Super Size Me*. He described the evolution of this project and how it began simply as a challenge to eat only McDonald’s for every meal for thirty consecutive days. He identified the problems of recurring fast food consumption and explained what happened to his body after eating entirely fast food for nearly a month. It was not his initial intent to change the fast food industry forever. However, after the movie began opening across America, McDonald’s started adding healthier choices to its menu. Eventually, other fast food restaurants followed suit. Since the success of *Super Size Me*, Spurlock continues using his recognition in a positive light to address the childhood obesity epidemic.

To wrap up the day, the childhood obesity panelists convened consisting of Melinda Hemmelgarn, investigative nutritionist and writer; Steve Williams, Health and Physical Education Consultant, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; and Amy Stringer Hessel, Program Officer for Missouri Foundation for Health. Each panelist described how their work contributes to ending the childhood obesity epidemic. Stringer Hessel proposed addressing the obesity epidemic by linking local and state agencies with the Missouri Foundation for Health. Her speech segued into Hemmelgarn’s eye-opening statistics regarding American’s food consumption. She also gave a quick test of brand recognition. The audience’s ability to identify unhealthy label after unhealthy label demonstrated how children want to eat what they recognize without considering nutrition or how it might affect their diet. Williams has been working with state policymakers to increase the number of minutes elementary and junior high school students spend in physical activity each week. He provided evidence linking increased physical activity with increased brain activity and retention, which can improve memory and test scores.

The most successful Health Policy Summit to date, the topics discussed presented actual solutions for fighting the childhood obesity epidemic and methods of improving health literacy. This year’s conference was an ideal opportunity and environment in which policymakers, health care professionals, researchers and educators came together to exchange ideas and discuss solutions to the health policy issues we face in Missouri and across the country. The time could not be better with a new political climate on the forefront and health care reform as a primary issue to be addressed.
AFFILIATE SPOTLIGHT: AMY LAKE

Amy Lake is a highly esteemed Extension Associate for Community Policy Analysis Center within the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources’ Division of Applied Social Sciences. Ms. Lake has over a decade’s worth of research experience focused on the health and wellbeing of those residing in rural communities, as well as economic and community development.

Ms. Lake received a BA in English and Anthropology from Boston University and continued her studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to attain an MS from the Department on Agriculture and Applied Economics. Her early research was conducted in Wisconsin and consisted of organizing eleven American Indian Tribal Health Centers. The goal of the project was to illustrate ways to reduce costs and improve community health. In order to do so, pilot projects were developed to take full advantage of the research opportunities available to this sector of the population. When devising a project with such a scope, it was critical to assess the inherent health of this population as well as their environment. The project received national attention and was replicable to other American Indian Tribal areas.

In the early 2000s, Ms. Lake worked with the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health as their Community Development and Outreach Specialist. In this role, she collaborated closely with rural communities performing community needs assessments and proposing grant endeavors. Her work with the Wisconsin Office of Rural Health coincided very much to her areas of interest: access to health care and health care financing; the relationship to rural health systems and economic development; and cultural competency in health care delivery, among others.

Recently, she applied her interests in rural development through documentary filmmaking in Montgomery Country, MO. The main purpose was to explore the role health insurance plays in the community’s health system, economic situation, as well as overall history. This project is community supported and produced. The hands-on process of discovering answers for specific communities, such as in Montgomery County, is a prime example of Ms. Lake’s applied research approach. Directly engaging the community maximizes community resources and educates the community about particular functions of its own health system. This illustrates how important Ms. Lake’s research method demands a community-driven approach by communicating directly with community leaders and members.

Becoming an affiliate of the Center for Health Policy has allowed Amy Lake the opportunity to maintain familiarity with the newest statewide and national health policy initiatives, particularly those issues in which the CHP is invested, such as health literacy and telemedicine. Ms. Lake’s work with rural communities across the state, supplies residents with the most current and accurate information necessary in order to meet their local needs.

In addition to regular policy updates from the CHP, the affiliation has provided developmental resources for community-based health projects and proposals that are relevant and well grounded for Ms. Lake’s research interests.

New Horizons for Jordan Bunn

December 17, 2008 marked a somber, but important day in the life of Center for Health Policy graduate research assistant, Jordan Bunn. It was her last day working for the Center.

The Center had the pleasure of employing Bunn for two semesters plus an entire summer. Bunn is a master’s student in the occupational therapy program, and in order to graduate in May, Bunn must spend the last semester of the OT program doing field work assignments. Two, six-week, full-time rotations at different locations will allow her to complete her master’s. Her first rotation will be at Columbia Regional Hospital and her second at St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital in her hometown of Memphis, TN.

Bunn provided a unique perspective to her research tasks for the CHP as an occupational therapy student. She was able to offer a practical perspective to policy questions and analyses. Bunn participated in various parts of the Health Literacy Missouri initiative over the last year.

From coordinating and conducting interviews with health literacy stakeholders to literature reviews of health professions’ curricula, her attention to detail and expediency was a strong asset to the Center for Health Policy team. As previously mentioned, she spent the summer of 2008 working full-time intensely comparing health literacy aspect of various schools’ curriculums and individual courses.

Last semester, as the Center and Bunn herself prepared for her departure, she continued to exert enormous efforts in her dedication to her research tasks. The Center for Health Policy wishes her the best of luck in all of her future endeavors as an occupational therapist!
RECENT HONORS, PUBLICATIONS, AND PRESENTATIONS:


Do Not Attempt Resuscitation and Limitations of Treatment Orders: an education pamphlet for patients. 6th grade reading level and available in Spanish as well as English. University of Missouri Health Care. 2008


Hagglund KJ. Distinguished Alumnus Award, Illinois State University, Department of Psychology, 2008

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