

Community Connections Newsletter

Department of Family Medicine and Community Health

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Making Decisions: What Helps our Patients Weigh Their Options?

Barry Saver, MD, MPH, associate professor of family medicine & community health, is leading a two-year research project to help patients make two difficult, controversial cancer screening decisions-

- 1) prostate cancer screening for men aged 50 to 75 and
- 2) breast cancer screening for women aged 40 to 49.

In collaboration with the Central Massachusetts Area Health Education Center, the project will also evaluate the role of community health workers in helping patients make these difficult decisions. The

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Signature Research in Family Medicine and Community Health

A Message from Warren Ferguson, Vice-Chair for Community Health

This issue of Community Connections showcases several community based research projects which align perfectly with the department's mission and strategic plan to integrate family medicine and community health. The research studies problems across the spectrum of community and public health: epidemiology of a highly prevalent group of tick-borne infections; gaining a patient-centered perspective on decisions to screen for breast and prostate cancer; interventions to improve disparate outcomes in pregnancy and maternity care; a primary prevention to provide preschoolers with skills to succeed; and lastly, a secondary prevention strategy to improve hypertensive outcomes. The work crosses nearly the entire life cycle; most focus on vulnerable populations experiencing health disparities. Finally, community based collaborations are evident, a consistent characteristic of scholarly work conducted by our faculty and trainees. As we celebrate our tenth anniversary of structuring community health efforts in the department, this work excites and inspires me. Enjoy!



Researching the impact of creative new tools for community health workers

by Deb Bonollo

The UMass Worcester Center for Health Equity Intervention Research (CHEIR) has several

ongoing research projects that are based in community settings and conducted in partnership with community members and outside agencies. Faculty members Lee Hargraves and Warren Ferguson have been involved with this group in a study that measures the effectiveness of community health workers in helping patients control their high blood pressure through the use of videotapes that share success stories from other patients who have faced the same challenge.

"CHWs using patient stories to support hypertension management" is a 4 year, multi-site study examining the



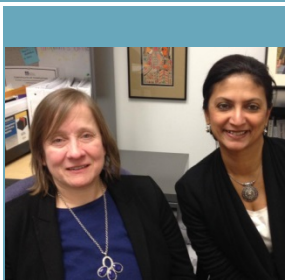
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work is being funded through the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Initiative (PCORI).

Shining the Light on Care Disparities after Pregnancy

Monika Mitra PhD and Linda Ling-Bellil PhD JD, assistant professors in the Commonwealth Medicine Center for Health Policy Research, are the recipients of a \$1.12 million NIH grant to investigate "Health Needs and Barriers to Perinatal Care for Women with Mobility Disabilities."



Linda Long-Bellil and Monika Mitra

Together with colleagues at Villanova and Harvard Medical Schools, this dynamic team's goal is to develop evidence on which to base perinatal care recommendations that will improve care for women with mobility-limiting disabilities.

KidSTEPS II Looks at Impact in

effects of having Community Health Workers (CHWs) support patients in their efforts to manage high blood pressure using videos of patient stories to encourage and maintain behavioral change. CHWs at Lowell Community Health Center and Family Health Center of Worcester have been trained in motivational interviewing to provide support with blood pressure management. They will also give study participants videos containing patient stories about controlling blood pressure. CHWs will have five in-person or telephone visits with participants and measure their blood pressure pre and post-intervention.

What do YOU know about preventing tick bites?

by Suzanne Cashman

Full results of work performed by students in a Population Health Clerkship on Martha's Vineyard will be published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice. How did this



Photo Source: <http://blog.itriagehealth.com/3-stages-of-lyme-disease/>

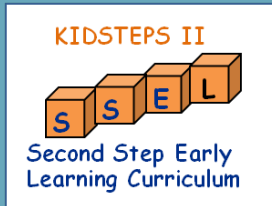
come to pass? Five UMass Worcester students--three medical and two nursing--traveled to the island to work with the Dukes County Health Council for their Clerkship. The Council wanted the students' help as it sought to gain a better understanding of residents' and tourists' inclination to practice selected behaviors considered effective prevention of tick bites. Why the concern about ticks? The island of Martha's Vineyard is considered endemic for Lyme Disease (LD), a commonly reported vector borne illness in the US, carried by deer ticks, and LD represents a significant physical and economic burden.

Through collecting and analyzing data from 946 participants' surveys, the students concluded that participants' knowledge of tick borne illnesses was poor and the frequency of practicing preventive behaviors was low. Approximately 1/3 of respondents did not know that LD can be treated effectively and another 1/3 did not know the late symptoms of untreated LD. Notably, two high risk groups--outdoor workers and youth--were particularly

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Classrooms



Carole Upshur and her team have been funded to continue working with the Second Step Early Learning curriculum. Pilot tested in preschools, this curriculum teaches children the social, emotional, and executive functioning skills they need to succeed in classroom settings. The new grant allows the team to follow the children through placement in elementary school, in order to determine whether skills taught in the early years are retained as children graduate from the preschool environment to a more structured classroom.

unlikely to use preventive behaviors. Working with the Health Council, the students developed a set of recommendations for the Council to enact that should improve people's inclination to adopt preventive behaviors.

Recently, a third year medical student who speaks Portuguese devoted one of her Flexible Clinical Experience weeks to entering the Portuguese survey results and developing recommendations aimed at helping the island's Brazilian residents become more aware and likely to engage in preventive behaviors. The Dukes County Health Council is hoping that our students will continue to work with them on this important health issue.

Seeking Safety During Pregnancy for Women with PTSD

Drs. Linda Weinreb and Carole Upshur, in collaboration with the Family Health Center Inc and the Edward M. Kennedy Community Health Center, are conducting a research study to address posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during pregnancy. The study fills an unmet need to develop and test feasible approaches to screening and treating PTSD in pregnancy. Funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resource Services Administration, this project is testing the evidence based *Seeking Safety* intervention for pregnant women, which integrates well with the perinatal support efforts of Healthy Start and similar support programs. The project will also provide capacity building by training staff to work with this evidence-based intervention that has been shown to decrease PTSD symptoms and risky behavior while increasing coping skills among vulnerable women.