



Focus

NOVEMBER 2001

Promoting Healthy Communities: Master of Public Health Program

In June 2002, Downstate will admit its first class of students to the new Master of Public Health degree program. Focusing on urban and immigrant health, it will prepare graduates to promote community health through education, research, and disease prevention and intervention.

In view of the current health crisis facing our country, the need for skilled public health professionals is greater than ever.

"If the anthrax scare teaches us anything, it is that collaborative public health approaches to disease prevention are vital to protect our nation's health," says Dr. Pascal James Imperato, distinguished service professor, chair of preventive medicine and community health, and M.P.H. program director.

"The M.P.H. program at Downstate is a natural outgrowth of our mission to promote health care and health education in the community's service," he says. "Downstate's rich history of serving the needs of urban and immigrant populations will help to set our M.P.H. program apart from all the rest."

Our campus is one of three SUNY schools to offer an M.P.H. degree. SUNY Buffalo School of Medicine and SUNY Albany School of Public Health are the other two.

"When we were building support for the program, we cited the series of *Health*

Reports Downstate recently issued as evidence of need," says Professor Judie LaRosa, deputy director of the M.P.H. program. "They pinpoint the glaring health disparities that exist in Brooklyn and the need for public health interventions," she explains.

Students who enroll in the program will have a choice of pursuing an M.P.H. degree alone or in combination with an M.D., M.S., or other degree. The curriculum includes instruction in biostatistics, epidemiology, health systems management, behavioral and environmental health, community health services, and global health. Besides addressing such leading health problems as HIV/AIDS, cancer, heart disease and stroke, asthma, and maternal/child health, the program aims to foster wider interest in gender differences, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic barriers to good health care.

Another important feature of the program is the Capstone or Practicum experience, intended to integrate classroom knowledge and clinical practice. Downstate is strategically placed to offer students a broad range of experiences in nearby hospitals, community organizations, and government agencies.

Faculty, students, and staff have been enthusiastic in their support for the new program. Here is what some of them have to say about the importance of a background in public health.

Gerald Deas, M.D., M.P.H., *clinical assistant professor of preventive medicine and community health and director of health education communication, is known for his successful campaigns against Argo Starch and to rid foods of harmful additives. He is revered in the community for his compassionate care (and willingness to make house calls):*

We often look for answers without knowing the right questions to ask. I have found that visiting patients where they live or work can open a window to understanding what ails them. For example, I once made a house call to a widow who suffered terribly from asthma attacks. As soon as I entered her home, I knew what was triggering her asthma. It was the strong-smelling glue she used to make ladies' hats.



At an open house held November 14, program leaders and faculty prepare to answer questions about the new M.P.H. degree program.

(continued on next page)

I received excellent medical training while I was a student at Downstate, but it's thanks to my background in public health that I have a multidimensional view of the social, environmental, and medical factors that can affect my patients' health.

Karen Benker, M.D., M.P.H., is medical director of Family Health Services, a UHB community health center serving the needs of predominantly low-income, immigrant families:

I support the need for an M.P.H. program based on my own experiences. I had been working for many years in primary care at Kings County Hospital, when a mother in her forties came in, half-paralyzed and unable to speak clearly. She had been receiving free hypertension medication as part of a special demonstration project sponsored by the N.Y.C. Department of Health, but when the project lost its funding, her uncontrolled hypertension caused her to have a stroke.

What had happened to this woman made me realize that I wanted to do more than just treat individual patients. By enrolling in an M.P.H. program, I learned how to intervene on the societal and systems level to keep communities healthy.

Ruth Browne, Sc.D., director of the Arthur Ashe Institute of Urban Health, recently received her doctorate in public health:

The diversity of cities presents unique challenges in health and medicine. Downstate's M.P.H. program, with its unique focus on urban and immigrant health, promises to complement and strengthen the Arthur Ashe Institute's capacity to design, implement, and test culturally tailored education, research and health promotional outreach programs by attracting expert faculty and students interested in understanding what predicts health behavior across different communities.

Omega Edwards, a fourth-year medical student, is interested in studying international health. He has been to Mozambique, where he volunteered as a medical missionary at an orphanage, and will travel to Papua New Guinea this spring on an Alumni Association-sponsored fellowship:

I believe that you must learn about the healthcare needs of a community before you can go in and meet those needs. I was fortunate to learn of the many unique healthcare needs in Mozambique. I know that it has helped to guide my studies here at Downstate.

The new M.P.H. program will foster a similar assessment of healthcare needs in Brooklyn. If an M.P.H. program had been in place when I started as a student, I would have definitely taken advantage of it.



Drs. Pascal and LaRosa

Program Director Pascal James Imperato, M.D., M.P.H. & T.M., is a Downstate graduate who later spent six years in West Africa directing immunization campaigns against smallpox, yellow fever, cholera, and other dreaded diseases. A former health commissioner of NYC, he also served as chairman of the board of the Health and Hospitals Corporation.

Deputy Director Judie LaRosa, Ph.D., R.N., was chair of the Department of Community Health at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and director of the Tulane Xavier Center of Excellence in Women's Health before coming to Downstate. She is known for her research on women's health and heart disease and as co-author of the NIH protocol mandating the inclusion of women and minorities in clinical trials.

SAVE THE DATE

Dec 7
EIGHTH ANNUAL WOMEN'S HEALTH CHALLENGES OF THE INNER CITY

Theme: "Total Management of the Obstetrical Patient."

Sponsored by the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, this all-day conference will discuss topics ranging from high-risk pregnancy, HIV, domestic violence, pain management.

8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Alumni Auditorium.

OOPS! We Apologize

Owing to a computer glitch, the names of some employees who are celebrating their 10th anniversary at Downstate did not appear in the Employee Recognition issue of *Focus*. All names beginning with C were inadvertently omitted, as well as two at the end of the alphabet. Our sincere apologies go to the following individuals and anyone else whose name was left out:

Osbert S. Campbell, Richard Campbell, Elizabeth M. Carr, Luzviminda F. Casapao, M. Philip Chinnan, Margarette Chrispin, Felicitas V. Clenista, Steven Lawrence Cohn, Judith E. Columbo, Leonzo Cuiman, Garfield Curchar, Brenda A. Curling, Nora Wheelous, and Lian-Fu Yang.

ALONG CLARKSON AVENUE

PIONEERING STUDY TO DETECT EARLY LUNG CANCER

A new technique for detecting lung cancer at an early, more treatable stage is being tested by researchers at Downstate in cooperation with Kings County Hospital Center. As part of a study sponsored by the New York Early Lung Cancer Action Program, our investigators are attempting to validate preliminary results of an earlier study led by Claudia Henschke, M.D., chief of chest imaging at Cornell Medical Center. Her team of researchers used computed tomography (CT) scanning to detect early-stage lung cancer in 1,000 smokers.

Advances in CT scanning make it possible for patients to undergo a painless 20-second procedure; the entire screening takes about 10 minutes. Shaped like a donut, the CT machine produces a cross-sectional scan of the chest and lungs. Whereas conventional x-ray shows only two views (front and side), CT scans produce many cross-sectional images, from top to bottom. Low-dose spiral CT scanning has the added advantage of producing no intersliced gaps. If the scan picks up anything suspicious, subjects are given a repeat screening followed by treatment with antibiotics to rule out ordinary infection. Based on the results, further diagnostic tests or surgery may be indicated for follow-up.

Radiologist David Gordon, M.D., is leading the study with the assistance of Drs. Harry Zinn, from Radiology, Linda Efferen, Pulmonary Medicine; Josh Burak, Surgery; and Constantine Axiotis, Pathology. Volunteers past the age of 60 who have a ten-pack year history of smoking (meaning one pack a day for ten years or two packs a day for five years) are sought to participate in the study. All subjects found to have early-stage lung cancer will receive immediate treatment for the disease.

Early detection is especially important in minority communities, such as those Downstate serves. Lung cancer accounts for 25 percent of diagnosed cancers among African American men, and the mortality rate is nearly 50 percent higher than that of white men; cancer death rates for African American women are also higher than average. Dr. Gordon's research team hopes that enough minority members will participate in the trial so that we can begin to find ways to prevent cancer deaths in our community.

2001 SEFA CAMPAIGN KICKS OFF

Last year our campus contributed \$135,000 to the State Employee Federated Appeal, which helps fund hundreds of charitable causes. At this year's campaign kickoff on October 9, SEFA captains and solicitors pledged to help raise at least \$150,000.

In the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy, members of Downstate generously donated blood, clothing, and other essential supplies. The SEFA campaign is another opportunity to help New Yorkers in a time of great need. Contributions are voluntary and can be made through pre-tax payroll deductions or by check.



BSB RENOVATION PROJECT GATHERS SPEED

Work continues on the multi-year renovation project to upgrade the infrastructure of the Basic Science Building and replace its old mechanical systems. When it was constructed in 1954, BSB was considered state of the art, but now it is showing definite signs of age. Construction of a new air conditioning system is nearing completion and should be ready by next summer.

The Gross Anatomy teaching labs and animal facilities are also being modernized to keep pace with research needs. In addition to improving the air handling systems, gross anatomy classrooms will be relocated and improved, and wall, floor and ceiling surfaces in the animal facilities will be refinished and resealed. And, at the site of the old library in the west wing, most of the construction necessary to convert and occupy temporary office space on the third floor has now been completed.

Elsewhere in BSB, lighting is being replaced with high-efficiency, dual-level fixtures that will provide improved illumination while also saving energy and money. All corridor ceilings from the first to the seventh floors of the BSB are being replaced with acoustical lay-in ceiling systems to give an updated appearance and provide easier access for installation of technology and infrastructure improvements.

DOCTORS AGAINST MURDER



After several years of quiescence, Doctors Against Murder (DAM) has regrouped. Founded in 1995 by the late Dr. Warren Wetzel, the organization is led by emergency medicine residents and staff at Downstate and Kings County Hospital who are dedicated to preventing violence in the community.

"With assistance from volunteers who are themselves survivors of violence, we plan to visit local schools and community centers to relay the message that violence must end," says Betty Chang, M.D., president of DAM. To find out more information, contact the Department of Emergency Medicine, 245-3320.

WEB NEWS

The Employee Assistance Program has launched a new website listing general information, helpful links, and topics of interest, including a "Topic of the Month." Like EAP itself, the site is confidential.

Employees who access the website (www.downstate.edu/eap) will not be identified in any way. Your Employee Assistance Program is a valuable resource for confidential help, referrals, information, and guidance. It's here to serve you, and now you can access its services any time you want.

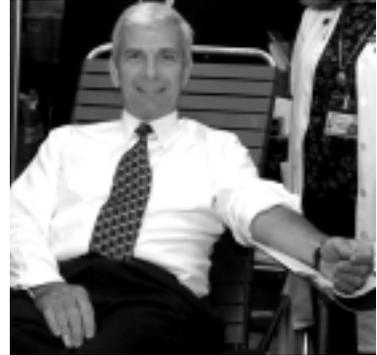
On the School of Graduate Studies' web page (www.downstate.edu/grad) you will now find a link called "Graduate School Announcements." This schedule of events includes seminar series, thesis defenses, student meetings, and other major Graduate School events.

news & events

UHB Leads Successful Blood Drive

Now that we've won at Jeopardy (see story on our brainy med students), the next challenge will be to win the College Bowl. We're talking blood drive, not football. The New York Blood Center is encouraging local colleges and universities to join in a unique competition to see which school can deliver the most pints of blood by year's end. Judging by the record number of donors who turned out for the hospital's blood drive in October, Downstate has a good shot at winning.

On a more somber note, the fact that members of our campus and other New Yorkers contributed blood in record numbers following the events of September 11 does not mean that there is no longer a need to donate. Not only do blood supplies need to be replenished periodically; the American Red Cross and the N.Y. Blood Center warn of a possible blood shortage once new regulations go into effect banning blood imports from Europe (as a precaution against the spread of mad cow disease). So even if you gave this time, please do so again when the hospital announces the dates of its next blood drive.



Dr. John A. Fallon, senior vice president for clinical affairs, was among the first to volunteer for the UHB blood drive.

Showing We Care Eases the Stress

This open letter from Juliette Matcham Sinclair, R.N., NS 71/73, to her nursing colleagues underscores the value of camaraderie in helping healthcare workers deal with the everyday stress and strain of their jobs. Though written well before the tragic events of September 11, it helps explain how the Downstate community manages to pull together, during even the most difficult times.

It was three months from my first anniversary working at Downstate. I had now become fairly well acquainted with everyone, so my true self was emerging. On my birthday, I dressed a little extra and made sure I said "Good morning" to everyone so I could get my birthday greeting.

After my grand entry, I attended to my assignment in the Epilepsy Monitoring Unit. When a colleague came to relieve me, saying that the head nurse wanted to see me, I wondered, "What did I do wrong? I don't recall making a mistake."

In her office, she bade me sit down. My mind said, "Oh boy, here it comes," but she merely asked me about my family and then said, "Come, let me show you something." She guided me to the patient's lounge, and as soon as we entered there were shouts of "Surprise! Happy Birthday!" The table was dressed and I had a decorated cake with my name on it. I was so touched that it brought tears to my eyes. Later, my colleagues in the EMU presented me with another birthday celebration.

What a day to remember! Nursing stations 71 and 73, you are all amazing. Apart from the support I got from you when I first joined the staff, your kind gesture has further lifted and pushed aside all the anxieties, fears, and tears I shed when I first started in the nursing field. May God bless you for sharing and caring.

Uncommon Valor

In appreciation of the role Downstate played following the attack on the World Trade Center, Brooklyn District Attorney Charles J. Hynes presented President John LaRosa with a Certificate of Appreciation for Downstate's "service to the people of New York in their time of crisis." Many individual acts of courage and kindness contributed toward the campus' effort to aid the victims of the tragedy. Here are a few examples:

When Tom Duggan, a new member of our University Police, received word from his son, who works for the NYPD, that police officers were having trouble using paper masks, he passed the request on to UHB administrators, who immediately donated 50 masks and respirators and sent out an appeal for more to other hospitals. UHB also sent cases of casting plaster, padding, and irrigation solution to local hospitals and emergency crew at the site of the disaster. Several of our doctors and residents went to Ground Zero to help out, as did John Czap from SMIC, and Michael Donohue, surgical technician and retired fireman.

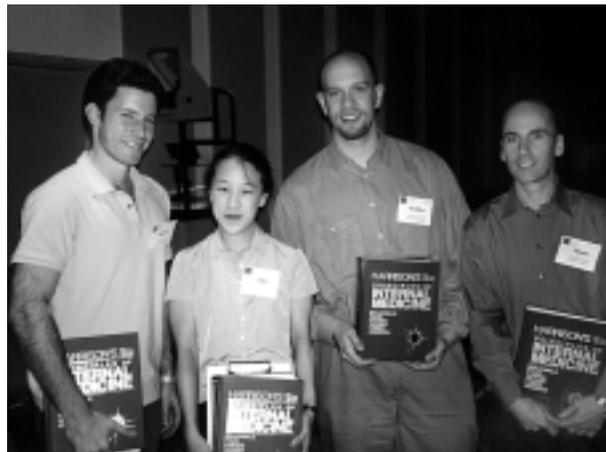
Those first days, secretarial staff at the Command Center worked 16 hours, and other staff members came in on their day off. Since many nurses could not (or refused to) leave their posts, their spouses arrived with dinner or to keep them company. Laboratory staff stayed overnight, and Rosario de la Pena, associate director of nursing, stayed in the OR holding area for 48 hours because she did not want to leave the nurses there alone.

Many cafeteria workers, too, remained through the night to provide food for staff members and local police. While Social Services worked nonstop operating a Crisis Center, our students responded in overwhelming numbers to donate blood and help raise money for the victims' families. Following a bomb scare at P.S. 235, Laurel Whitaker, director of the Child Life Center, organized activities for the children of staff members who had picked their children up from school and brought them here.

Whiz Kids

Four Downstate students aced the Medical School Jeopardy Tournament, sponsored by the American College of Physicians and the American Society of Internal Medicine. Fourth-year students Spencer Dorn, Geoffrey Neimark, Thomas Uldrick, and Emily Wan emerged as the winning team in the final round of competition.

After competing against Yale and Mt. Sinai in the opening round, our team advanced to the finals and beat out Yale, New York Medical College (last year's winner) and the University of Connecticut. Each member of the SUNY Downstate team received a Harrison's textbook as prize.



The winning team: (from l. to r.) Spencer Dorn, Emily Wan, Geoffrey Neimark, and Thomas Uldrick.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

The message that early detection is the best protection against breast cancer was brought home this October by the Breast Cancer Awareness Committee's activities. Co-chair Bettina Willis, R.N., Aggie Smith N.P., and William Solomon, M.D., gave lectures on breast health and cancer for patients, community, and staff. Other members brought a festively decorated information cart to the O.P.D. and offered free breast exams and mammograms for our uninsured patients.

Committee chair Ellen McTigue, N.P., reports that almost \$1,000 was raised by participants in the Making Strides Walkathon led by Sarah Marshall, R.N. Expanded participation by the Departments of Family Practice, Ob/Gyn, Medicine, Nursing, Patient Education, Surgery, Clinical Labs, and Medical Education helped to create the awareness needed to make the month a success.



UHB members gather around the information cart: (front l. to r.): Betty Jung, R.N., Maria Yomtov, R.N., Marlene Ferguson, R.N., Jean Ward, breast cancer survivor and health educator; (back row) Karen Zmudczynski, M.D., Jeannette Marrero, R.N., chief nurse executive and hospital COO, Bettina Willis, R.N., James Shanahan, M.D., William Solomon, M.D., Dolly Romeo, R.N., and Aggie Smith, N.P. Not shown are Sara Marshall, R.N., and committee chair Ellen McTigue, N.P.

Congratulations

Ivan Bodis-Wollner, M.D., D.Sc., professor of neurology, was voted in as a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Anita Crooks, chaplain, was honored for public service at the Silver Anniversary Annual Awards Luncheon sponsored by Church Women United in Brooklyn.

Mahmood M. Hussain, Ph.D., associate professor of biology and cell biology and pediatrics, was invited to speak at the 6th World Congress on Advances in Oncology and the 4th International Symposium on Molecular Medicine held in Greece.

Scott Miller, M.D., professor of clinical pediatrics with the Division of Pediatric Hematology and Oncology, was honored by the Sickle Cell Trust, an organization of U.S. and Caribbean medical and business professionals, for his contributions to the study and management of sickle cell disease. Dr. Miller has served as principle investigator on many multi-site trials and devoted much of his time to caring for children who suffer from the disease.

Shoshana Milstein, RHIA, CCS, has been appointed director of medical records at University Hospital of Brooklyn. A graduate of Downstate's Health Information Management B.S. program, she has been a member of the department since 1998.

Richard M. Rosenfeld, M.D., director of otolaryngology, is cited in last month's issue of *Parenting* as a leading expert on children's ear infections who believes that we should limit the use of antibiotics, except when they are truly needed, and reduce the problem of bacterial drug resistance.

Family Practice Wins Support for School-Based Programs



Thanks to a major grant from the New York State Department of Health, Family Practice will be able to continue offering free, comprehensive health services to students at two neighboring schools, George Wingate High School and P.S. 13. Totalling more than a half million dollars, the grant has been awarded to the School Health Program to provide care for children in high-risk, low-income communities.

"This grant is especially welcome in light of recent cutbacks in city funding," says Dr. Miriam T. Vincent, chair of Family Practice. "Now we will be able to maintain the same level of care for children who might otherwise never see a health professional outside of an emergency room. This program provides a healthy start for our community school children."

Ten years ago, when the Wingate Health Center opened its doors to students, it was one of the first school-based clinics in the city. Today, the center handles close to 8,000 patient visits each year. The demographics of the school reflect Brooklyn's inner-city communities. The students are predominantly black or Hispanic; 70 percent are immigrants or first-generation Americans; and 90 percent come from low-income families.

Under the direction of Dr. Kevin T. Custis, assistant professor in the Department of Family Practice, the center's staff—including a family nurse practitioner, physician assistant, and clinical social worker—offer physical exams, dental and vision care, immunizations, screenings for tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases, counseling on tobacco and drug use, mental health referrals, and social work evaluations. For students who are struggling to adjust to new surroundings or have witnessed violence, the social work component is especially valuable. Another important feature of the Wingate program is the violence prevention curriculum it has introduced within ninth-grade English and social studies classes.

"While teenagers tend to be healthy, they take risks that can jeopardize their health, like eating junk food, having unprotected sex, and engaging in interpersonal violence," explains Dr. Custis. "Part of our job is to discourage these risky behaviors."

The Child Health Service at nearby P.S. 13 was the first school health program started by the Department of Family Practice in 1985. Now headed by Dr. Custis, with the help of a family nurse practitioner and registered nurse, it provides physical exams and immunizations, plus first aid and asthma education to over 850 students, pre-K through grade 5. Plans are now underway to add a dental and vision component, as well.

Even though health services at both schools are provided irrespective of ability to pay, Family Practice helps families enroll their children in Child Health Plus, the state's managed care program for children. These activities are part of a larger initiative by Downstate to expand access to care and improve the health of Brooklyn residents. Dr. Custis believes that many of the borough's most serious health problems can be avoided through prevention and early intervention.

"If we can reach these kids early on and encourage healthy behaviors, it can have a ripple effect, improving the health of family members as well as entire communities."

Focus is published by the Office of Institutional Advancement for the faculty, staff, and students of SUNY Downstate.

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