

MPH Alumni Newsletter

Winter 2011-12; Volume 5, Number 3

Public Health Connections from the Last Frontier



Affiliate Faculty Profile: Timothy Thomas, MD

Dr. Timothy Thomas is a medical epidemiologist. He is originally from Kenya, but considers himself a “global citizen.” He went to medical school in Indiana and completed a residency in Family Practice in Huntington, West Virginia. Dr. Thomas then returned to Africa for two years and worked for Doctors without Borders in Somalia and a mission hospital in central Kenya. He returned to the United States in the mid-90s to work in Bethel, Alaska for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Corporation. He later joined the CDC as an Epidemic Intelligence Service Officer where he completed the two year CDC epidemiology training based at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Field Station in Anchorage. He subsequently returned to Kenya for seven years as head of the HIV research department at the CDC Field Station in western Kenya. The work there included a Phase 2b clinical trial looking at the use of antiretrovirals during late pregnancy and while breastfeeding to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV in resource limited settings. Other work included assessment of the prevalence of HIV and other STDs in the region and preparation for an NIH-funded HIV vaccine study. Dr. Thomas returned to Alaska in 1998 to work with the CDC Arctic Investigations Program, primarily on water and sanitation and oral health issues. In October 2011, he joined the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium as Director of Clinical and Research Services Department in the Division of Community Health Services.

What are you passionate about in public health?

I am a generalist; that’s why I trained in Family Medicine. I enjoyed surgery, obstetrics, and pediatrics. Public health training can take you in many directions, and the skills can be applied in multiple settings. Having spent a lot of time in resource limited settings of East Africa, I am perplexed (but not surprised) by the disparities I see in this country where there are so many resources. I’m interested in how different communities around the world have addressed public health issues using limited resources and how some of those approaches could be used in the US.



What skills do public health professionals need today?

Much of public health is data driven, so being able to understand the data and apply it appropriately is critical. It’s important to ground our work in the best available evidence. It is also essential to communicate clearly to the public, a public which is often bombarded with conflicting information.

What role can alumni play in today’s public health world? Teaching, mentoring, and getting young students interested in the field.

What are your interests outside of public health? Getting outdoors whatever the weather to hike, bike, ski (though having grown up on the equator in Africa my snow-related skills are not so strong). 👍

MPH Alumni Association:

Dan Lien, President ('07)
Tammy Zulz, Vice-President ('07)
Amanda Walch, Secretary ('08)
Ann Potempa ('09)

Dept. of Health Sciences
3211 Providence Drive
Anchorage, Alaska 99508
Phone: 907-786-6565
Fax: 907-786-6572
mph@uaa.alaska.edu

UAA



Check out your alumni profile and visit the MPH Website: <http://health.uaa.alaska.edu/mph/>

Phase I of New Health Sciences Building Completed

On October 7, 2011, the University of Alaska Anchorage held a grand opening celebration for its new state-of-the-art Health Sciences



Building (HSB). UAA is considered the University of Alaska's health campus and is home to the WWAMI biomedical program (Alaska's

medical school) and degree programs in the nursing, physician assistant, medical technology, dental assisting and hygiene, and emergency health fields. The 66,000-square-foot HSB facility will help the University respond to Alaska's growing need for well-educated health care professionals.

The HSB is on Providence Drive--an ideal location for the University to build upon strong partnerships with its neighbors in the growing U-Med District. The medical, nursing, clinical laboratory, and physician assistant programs will be housed in the new building.

Bringing these health programs together under one roof will provide opportunities for interdisciplinary simulation, allowing students to integrate theory and practice.

With a focus on distance education, the HSB features classrooms with technology that allow faculty and students in Anchorage to connect with students across Alaska. The instructional spaces are designed for interactive learning, simulation of real-life clinical situations, and collaborative hands-on experiences.

The University's newest building is Phase I of what will be a Health Sciences Complex on UAA's Anchorage campus. Phase II of the HSB will connect the building with a second 98,000-square-foot, three-story structure with additional lab and classroom space for UAA's rapidly expanding health programs.

For MPH program alumni, it is exciting to see the progress of the Department of Health Sciences and the MPH program. So where will the MPH be housed? According to Rhonda Johnson, "Current plans call for the MPH program to be in Phase II of the anticipated four-phase Health Sciences complex. However, as no funds have yet been allocated for the future phases, we anticipate that the UAA MPH program will remain housed in Diplomacy for the next few years at least." 👍

Alumni Profile: Ambrosia Bowlus

Ambrosia Bowlus earned her MPH degree in 2011. Her thesis evaluated VakTrAK, a new immunization registry created and managed by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services.

Ambrosia grew up in Anchorage and earned her bachelor's degree in medical technology from UAA in 2005. She then went to Washington and worked as a microbiologist at the University of Washington. She also spent the entire 2007 baseball season watching games at most of the country's baseball fields.

Ambrosia returned to Anchorage to complete her MPH degree. She recently finished her first year as the manager of the Alaska Trauma Registry for the Department of

Health and Social Services. Her job is to collect and manage trauma-related statistics (such as falls, drownings, and motor vehicle accidents) submitted from 24 hospitals across the state. These statistics are used for injury prevention purposes and research. Ambrosia said MPH students or alumni who are interested in doing a research project using this data should contact her.

When she is not working, Ambrosia likes to cross country ski and downhill ski.



Cambodia Mission Trip Sparks Desire to Do More Globally

This fall, alumna Amanda Walch (MPH '08) and nine colleagues spent 11 days working with the Sihanouk Hospital in Cambodia. What started as a trip to help establish a diabetes clinic turned into a project to create a women's health clinic. Walch and a team of hospital administrators, nurses, and certified nursing assistants work on a plan to provide services and teach clinic staff.

While most Cambodian nationals receive free health care, funding for the hospital was hampered when the March typhoon hit Japan, forcing the country to redirect their funds back to their own country. Penom Pen (Cambodia's capital) is one of the poorest cities on earth. "To see how little these people actually have was pretty astonishing," Walch said.

Breast cancer screening and prevention rose to the top of the "needs list," and Walch and her colleagues relied on best practices standards from the United States, the WHO, and the CDC. Since most Cambodian women have their babies at home, a separate pre-natal clinic was established for pregnant women to receive health checks and treatment.

During her 11 days "on the ground," Walch, who works as an instructor of Dietetics and Nutrition at UAA, found herself reflecting on her various classes during her MPH



Amanda Walch (second from left) and her team in Cambodia.

coursework. "Program Evaluation was at the top of the list. I knew they could really use a good program evaluation here."

Walch's most memorable day was a visit to an HIV homeless camp in the city center. When their escort asked if they had any money to donate, they pooled together what they had with them (around \$30). "With that \$30 we bought 40 kilos of rice and one bar of soap for each resident," Walch said. "Had we known, we would have brought so much more."

Walch was also struck by the generosity of Cambodians, who provided fruit, potluck items, and lunches to the team. "These people have virtually nothing, yet they are so generous with what they have."

Reflecting on her experience in Cambodia, Walch hopes to go back some day. "Globally, in the United States, I could maybe make some sort of a difference, but there I could see a much higher impact. You do have the ability to change people's lives." 👍

Alumni Profile: Jacqueline "Aparpak" Shirley

Jacqueline is a Tribal member of the Native Village of Hooper Bay. She completed her MPH in October 2011. For her thesis, Jacqueline conducted a multiple (5) policy analysis titled "The Management of Open Dumps in Rural Alaska and the Continuing Need for Public Health Action." Jacqueline is employed at Zender Environmental Health and Research Group, a non-profit organization that provides environmental program services for Tribal and isolated rural populations. As a Senior Environmental Scientist, Jacqueline

provides program environmental health policy and justice, capacity building, water and wastewater related issues, and solid waste management strategies and solutions for rural

communities across the state. Jacqueline lives in Anchorage with her six-year-old son Tabaaha Cingliaq, a beautiful dog named "Half-face," and two bossy old cats named "Nini" & "Six-toes."



MPH Alumni Newsletter

You Can Give Back to the MPH Program!

Alumni of UAA's MPH program can give back to the master's program in lots of ways beyond donations:

- **Give your time.** Alumni have successfully completed theses and can serve as mentors to current MPH students preparing for or working on their thesis projects.
- **Share your resources.** Many alumni have gone on to take public health jobs in Alaska and beyond, and these jobs give them new skills and access to public data that can be used for further analysis. Read the profile

about Ambrosia Bowlus and her willingness to share Alaska trauma data with anyone interested in studying the subject.

- **Stay connected.** Make sure the MPH program has a current online profile for you, including phone number and email address.
- **Contribute if you can.** MPH Alumni Association Vice President Tammy Zulz started \$50 scholarships to help current students pay for textbooks each semester. If you would like to contribute to this scholarship, contact Tammy at tsc3@cdc.gov.

Coordinator's Corner



Happy 2012! As the holiday season wanes and the days lengthen, we are looking forward to another productive academic year.

I am pleased to announce that the UAA MPH program received its initial charter as the Gamma Iota Chapter of the Delta Omega Honorary Society in Public Health in October 2011. Delta Omega elects new students, faculty, alumni, and honorary members based on high academic standards and outstanding performance in scholarship, teaching, research, and community service. Election of membership into Delta Omega is intended to not only recognize merit, but also to encourage and further excellence in and devotion to public health work. We will be inducting our first Honorary and Alumni members on January 26, 2012 in Anchorage. For more information about Delta Omega, visit the National Chapter's web site at www.deltaomega.org.

We are also happy to welcome Dr. Steve Konkel, an environmental health/rural sanitation specialist and planner to our faculty in January 2012. He will take a leadership role in our recent efforts to engage undergraduate students in the pursuit of excellent public health practice through the new Minor in Public

Health and emerging undergraduate tracks in Health Sciences (BSHS). Several new courses have been developed to support these new undergraduate options. We anticipate a periodic demand for adjunct teachers to support these new courses; if interested in learning more about these teaching opportunities, please contact me.

The International Congress of Circumpolar Health (ICCH15) will be held in Fairbanks, Alaska August 5-10, 2012. Abstracts are due no later than January 31, 2012. Please consider sharing your good work with others in this important forum. There will be many opportunities for MPH alumni, faculty, and students to get involved in this international gathering expected to attract 600-800 colleagues. For more information, contact me or visit www.icch15.com.

Mark your calendars! We hope to see you at the next MPH Alumni Meet and Greet on Thursday January 26th, in conjunction with the 2012 Health Summit and the 2012 MPH Symposium in Anchorage.

Drop a line when you get a chance. We love to hear from you!

Rhonda M. Johnson, DrPH, MPH, FNP
MPH Program Coordinator
Department Chair, Health Sciences
Rhonda.Johnson@uaa.alaska.edu
907-786-6545. 🍷