ICCH in Fairbanks Showcases Arctic Health

In August, Fairbanks hosted the 15th International Congress on Circumpolar Health – 45 years after hosting the very first Congress.

According to Rhonda Johnson, president of the American Society for Circumpolar Health and program coordinator of the UAA MPH program, the week-long Congress brought together representatives from more than nine northern countries to share research and discuss challenges and innovative successes to improve health in circumpolar regions. More than 500 clinicians, scientists, policymakers, educators, students, and professionals attended to learn more about issues affecting the Far North. According to a press release issued by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, these issues included nutrition, obesity, food security, the impact of climate change on health, and the high incidence of suicide.

This Congress, which happens every three years, was co-sponsored by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and organized by the American Society for Circumpolar Health and the International Union for Circumpolar Health.

Johnson gave the welcoming address for the Congress, stressing the significance of the event for circumpolar professionals. “An important part of this congress is the opportunity for networking across the northern regions.”

Several state political and health leaders presented at the Congress. Fran Ulmer, chair of the U.S Arctic Research Commission and former lieutenant governor and UAA chancellor, talked about how health fits in with arctic research. Linda Chamberlain, public health specialist with the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and affiliate faculty with the UAA MPH program, gave a keynote address about children exposed to domestic violence. Plenary speaker Lt. Gov. Mead Treadwell organized an afternoon panel on suicide.

The UAA MPH program was one of several co-sponsors of the Congress. Students, alumni, and faculty attended and took active roles as presenters, moderators, and exhibitors. MPH student Jen Jones from Whitehorse, Yukon co-chaired the Student Organizing Committee. MPH students Graham Knapp from Bethel and Doreen Leavitt from Barrow were active members of the same committee. The following other students attended and were actively involved: Virginia Walker, Marina Vinnakova, Cynthia Schauer, Jessika Beam, Bryan Reed, Brian Lefferts, Sheila Soule, Bruce Dotterer, and Andrew Tooyak. MPH alumni who participated in the Congress included Vanessa Hiratsuka, Cheryl Case, Stacy Kelley, and Peggy Nye. MPH faculty members included Jenny Miller, Nancy Nix, Liz Snyder, Steve Konkel, Rhonda Johnson, and other affiliate faculty.

Videos of plenary speakers and featured topics will be available soon on the International Congress website: http://icch15.com/.
Alumni Profile: Becca Puckett

Becca will receive her MPH in Fall 2012. She successfully defended her thesis project which examined what factors influence Alaska teen mothers’ decision to breastfeed. She presented her research at the APHA annual meeting and at state and local conferences. Becca graduated from DePaul University in Chicago with a BA in Communication, and worked for 12 years in Chicago, including for the consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

It was through McKinsey’s work with the Gates Foundation that she first became aware of the impact that public health can have on a community. This, coupled with the birth of her daughter, changed Becca’s professional focus from publishing to public health, specifically maternal and child health (MCH). She completed a certificate in MCH as part of her MPH.

Becca works with the breastfeeding support program at Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage and is currently completing her clinical internship to become a board certified lactation consultant. She lives in Anchorage with her husband Andy and her kids Maia and Jack. She also enjoys skiing, traveling, and spending time on the beach.

MPH Updates

Lisa McGuire ’08
(Anchorage, AK)
In February, Lisa McGuire returned from over two years of public health contract work in post-earthquake Haiti where she developed and managed cholera and HIV prevention programs. Lisa was recently hired by the State of Alaska, Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS), Division of Senior and Disabilities Services as the Provider Quality Assurance Manager. In this role, she oversees the certification process of Medicaid & Medicaid Waiver providers, and develops and manages various quality assurance mechanisms.

Lisa continues to work on quality of life and health issues in Haiti through an agri-business project with a rural farmers' cooperative.

Ann Potempa ’09
(Anchorage, AK)
Ann Potempa was hired in July as a health communications and social marketing specialist for the DHSS, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Ann assists with communications and social marketing needs across the Section’s prevention programs for cancer, tobacco, injuries, and obesity. A priority for the Section is strengthening its Obesity Prevention and Control Program, thus much of Ann’s time is spent on the childhood obesity social marketing campaign Play Every Day, started in 2012.

Marc Deede, MPH Student
(Soldotna, AK)
MPH student Marc Deede was featured briefly as a care provider in a Public Service Announcement for Central Peninsula Hospital’s residential alcohol and chemical dependence treatment center in the Soldotna area. Serenity House has provided client services with a non-medical model since the 1980s, and Marc is involved with the program as a consultant. He prepared a program evaluation of the family-based segment of the treatment as part of his MPH thesis, also presenting that paper at the 2010 Circumpolar Health conference in Copenhagen, Denmark.

“It was an honor to help with their ad,” Marc said. “I thought everyone did a great job, including the amateur actor who portrayed a client--she’s a hospital employee who just volunteered for the cause.” The spot is still showing on Anchorage TV stations.
Alumni Profile: Marcy Rein

Since successfully defending her thesis in May, Marcy Rein has had a great summer! She acted as “trip nurse” for sixteen teens and chaperones on a week-long tour in South Africa and two weeks of service work in Malawi. Upon her return, she learned that Alaska had received a CDC grant to improve health promotion for people experiencing disabilities. She had advocated for, and consulted on, the application as part of her thesis practicum.

Marcy continues to work with the Division of Public Health converting the Ad Hoc Committee on Health and Disabilities she created as part of her thesis practicum to a permanent Disability Community Planning Group to oversee grant activities to address health promotion for Alaskans experiencing disabilities. She also serves as the Alaska liaison to the American Association on Health and Disability.

Marcy home schools her two teenaged boys, one of whom experiences a learning disability. She is also starting a small business to continue the work she began in her thesis practicum by providing consulting and education to promote inclusion of people experiencing disabilities, particularly in health promotion, recreation, and tourism activities.

Alumni Profile: Ginger Mongeau

Ginger Mongeau received her MPH this summer. Her thesis “Follow-up procedures to achieve high retention rate in HIV/AIDS prevention research with incarcerated people” analyzed the efforts taken by CDC-funded Project START to retain this difficult-to-reach population in a 6-month longitudinal study. Project START has been incorporated into community-based organizations and correctional settings in 35 states (including Alaska) and four countries. The results of Ginger’s thesis will provide additional guidance for community groups and researchers working with formerly incarcerated people.

Ginger has lived in Alaska for 20 years, and worked for 13 years at UAA as data manager and project manager for the Center for Behavioral Health Research and Services. She has been involved in a variety of projects related to substance abuse and mental health, homelessness, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, HIV/AIDS, and suicide prevention that directly affect the quality of life for Alaskans.

Ginger enjoys being with friends and family, playing video games, biking, quilting, reading, and traveling. She also fosters dogs and puppies for local animal rescue groups.

Scholarships for Textbooks

The UAA MPH Alumni Association has created a series of Global Health Scholarships for current students. These $50 awards are available for reimbursing textbook costs for Spring 2013. Applicants must be currently accepted into the MPH program and in good academic standing. Applicants should have an interest in international/global health issues. To apply, write a short 250 word essay describing your interest in international/global health and how you plan to use your MPH coursework and/or thesis project to pursue this interest.

Submit your completed essay with contact information to MPH Alumna Tammy Zulz (tezulz59@gmail.com). The deadline is October 26, 2012 and recipients will be notified in November 2012.
September has swept in with the recent windstorm in southcentral Alaska. Thank you to everyone who helped us host and energize the recent International Congress of Circumpolar Health (ICCH15) in Fairbanks this August (see front page story); there were so many UAA MPH students, alumni, faculty, and advisory members involved.

We are already planning for our next global health conference: the World Congress of Epidemiology (WCE) to be held in Anchorage August 17-24, 2014. The theme is “Global Epidemiology in a Changing Environment: The Circumpolar Perspective.” Please let us know if you are interested in being involved. Visit the website at: www.epidemiology2014.com

Another exciting opportunity in our region is a new collaborative PhD program in “Circumpolar Health and Well-Being” under the auspices of the University of the Arctic. To help with the planning, our graduate program is participating in a project funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers. We can expect more schools related to arctic health and well-being, new co-taught courses, and perhaps more circumpolar colleagues in our own graduate courses. Our distance delivery format and focus on northern health issues makes us a valuable partner.

Next up is a winter school in Abisko, Sweden in May 2013 and a “summer school” in Nuuk, Greenland in September 2013. More information is available in the following flyer: www.uarctic.org/A5Sommerskole_folder_1kor_r_qFAt7.pdf.file.

In October, we will have a booth at the APHA meeting in San Francisco, staffed by our MPH Ambassadors (students Christie Flanagan, Marlene McCabe, and Min Tong), Drs. Miller and Konkel, and department admin Katie Frost. Congratulations to new UAA MPH Alumna Wendy Parsons who will present a peer-reviewed poster on her practicum thesis project. Visit the APHA website at: www.apha.org/meetings/AnnualMeeting

And, of course, we are already planning for our next self-study to maintain our Council for Education in Public Health accreditation. There will be several forums and opportunities for you and others in 2013 to provide feedback and advice on how we can best continue to support “frontiers of excellence in public health.”

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

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New Public Health Travel/Service Learning Group

Led by faculty member Nancy Nix, a group of MPH alumni started the “Public Health Travel/Service Learning Group.” With a passion for rural Alaska and overseas public health volunteering, the members are brainstorming opportunities for students, alumni, and faculty alike. Their vision is twofold: 1) to create a clearinghouse list of possibilities for volunteer opportunities in rural Alaska and overseas and 2) to facilitate an annual (or biennial) trip to a location in need of public health volunteers. The group is not affiliated with the University of Alaska Anchorage; however, options may be available for independent study credits. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months. For additional information, please contact Nancy Nix: nancy.nix@uaa.alaska.edu.