

CANCER NOTES



"Joining forces for cancer control in Virginia"

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The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) will be broadcasting a four-hour television documentary about social inequities and racial disparities in health. The four-part series, titled "Unnatural Causes: Is Inequality Making Us Sick?", will begin on Thursday, March 28th, at 10 p.m., with follow-up on April 3, 10, and 17 (check local listings). For more information about the documentary and related events, go to <http://www.unnatural-causes.org>.

CANCER AT A GLANCE: CANCER IN LOCAL HEALTH DISTRICTS



The Virginia Department of Health's **Comprehensive Cancer Control (CCC) Project** recently published cancer data on its website (<http://www.vahealth.org/cdpc/cancerprev/data.asp>) for each of the 35 local health districts. Featured on the website are cancer incidence (new cases), staging, mortality (deaths), and risk factor data for various types of cancer. Based on a summation of all of the cancer indicators, a risk assessment was performed for each health district and leading districts at risk were identified.

Some key findings are:

- **Richmond, Rappahannock-Rapidan, and Eastern Shore** have the highest risk for female *breast cancer* primarily due to fewer cases diagnosed at an early stage and higher mortality rates. Mammography rates are lower in southwest and northwest parts of the state.
- **Southside** is leading all health districts for risk of *prostate cancer*, primar-

ily due to a low screening (PSA test) rate (46.2%) and higher mortality rate (39.6 per 100,000).

- **Crater** is leading all districts in terms of risk for *colon cancer*, with a high incidence rate (59.3 per 100,000) and high mortality rate (25 per 100,000). The state mortality rate is 18.9 per 100,000.
- **Eastern Shore** is leading all health districts in terms of higher *lung cancer* incidence (95.1) and mortality (78.6) rates and fewer cases (13.3%) diagnosed at an early stage.

Those local health districts at higher risk will be eligible to apply for funds from the CCC Project to conduct cancer education and awareness activities. Contact Gail Jennings (804-864-8212; Gail.Jennings@vdh.virginia.gov) for more cancer statistics, and Theresa Teekah (804-864-7877; Theresa.Teekah@vdh.virginia.gov) for information about the CCC Project.

NEW DIRECTION FOR MINORITY HEALTH

In May 2007, Governor Tim Kaine announced that Michael O. Royster, M.D., M.P.H., would become the new Director of the Office of Minority Health and Public Health Policy (OMHPHP) at the Virginia Department of Health. Dr. Royster had previously been the Health Director for Crater Health District, headquartered in Petersburg.

Through its new Division of Health

Equity, the goal of the OMHPHP is to promote a broader understanding of the causes of health disparities. Using a social justice framework, OMHPHP will draw attention to the critical importance of the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and burdens facing poor and minority individuals and communities across the state. With a focus on social determinants of health, this frame-

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NEW STATE HEALTHCARE PROGRAM FOR THE UNINSURED

Karen Remley, MD, MBA, the newly appointed health commissioner for the Virginia Department of Health, began her appointment last month. Dr. Remley succeeded Dr. Robert Stroube, who retired on January 1, 2008. Dr. Remley was the vice president of medical affairs at Sentara Leigh Hospital in Norfolk and assistant professor of Pediatrics and Community Faculty School of Public Health at Eastern Virginia School of Medicine prior to assuming her new position. Dr. Remley has also served as Medical Director of External Quality at Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield of Virginia, CEO of Physicians for Peace, and as a member of several hospital boards and commissions. **Welcome Dr. Remley!**

Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF) is pleased to announce the launch of its newest program, *Virginia Cares Uninsured Program* (VCUP). This program began providing comprehensive, sustained service to uninsured Virginians on August 1, 2007, and was made possible through a grant from the state General Assembly.

This state-wide program is designed to assist uninsured Virginia residents who have been diagnosed with a chronic, debilitating or life-threatening illness and are experiencing difficulties accessing the appropriate healthcare. PAF's trained healthcare professionals are available to provide case management services, developing safety nets of healthcare services to meet pharmaceutical, surgical, radiation, physician, and social service needs of the uninsured.

PAF will serve as a referral source for the following agencies:

- Virginia Department of Social Services,
- Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services,
- Virginia Department of Health, and
- State agencies serving the uninsured.

PAF has been educating Virginians about this new initiative through a series of advertisements placed in local newspapers throughout the state and by personal outreach visits statewide to health departments, free clinics, community health centers and other facilities providing services to the uninsured.

Additional information on Patient Advocate Foundation's *Virginia Cares Uninsured Program* and be found at www.pafcares.org or 1-800-532-5274.

VIRGINIA TECH LAUNCHES HEALTH WEBSITE

Virginia Tech researchers suggest road to better health just a mouse click away

BLACKSBURG, Va., October 20, 2007 – Psychologists in Virginia Tech's College of Science have developed a free Internet health program that helps people make permanent lifestyle changes to improve their health.

"Most Americans know they should eat better and be more physically active," said Richard Winett, director of the university's Center for Research in Health Behavior. "What most don't know is that they don't have to make drastic life changes to do it. Making just a few key changes can have big health benefits." The new program, called "Guide-to-Health", provides the skills, support and information people need to increase physical activity, eat more nutritiously, and prevent weight gain. The program is

based on National Institutes of Health (NIH)-supported research conducted by Winett and his team on women and men from diverse backgrounds.

Winett said many otherwise healthy adults gain about two pounds each year, so people who are normal weight at age 30 can become overweight or even obese by the time they are 50. For an ever-growing number of mid-life adults, the signs of inactivity and gradual weight gain show up as higher blood pressure, higher "bad" cholesterol, more body fat, and a condition known as pre-diabetes.

"Left alone, these symptoms can become chronic diseases, can shorten your life and can make the years you have to live less enjoyable," he said.

The health focus favored by many scientists now is what is called "weight

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VIRGINIA PROSTATE CANCER COALITION HOLDS EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

On September 27th, the Virginia Prostate Cancer Coalition (VPCC) launched a highly successful community education symposium, entitled **“Power Up for Cancer Control”**. The event was held at Fauquier Hospital in Warrenton. The event was funded through a \$2,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Health’s Comprehensive Cancer Control (CCC) Project. This funding was part of a larger, one-time \$50,000 budget allocation from the state General Assembly in 2006 dedicated to prostate cancer awareness activities.

VPCC collaborators included Fauquier Health System, Lake Manassas Cancer Center, the Westminster USTOO support group, the local American Cancer Society Board, Patient Advocate Foundation, the Virginia Cancer Plan Action Coalition (CPAC), and five area physicians.

The symposium featured panel presentations by physicians, who spoke about prostate cancer and breast cancer to an audience of over 50 residents from Fauquier, Prince William, Loudoun and Rappahannock counties. Free hospital PSA (prostate-specific antigen) blood tests to detect prostate cancer were provided to 22

men. Eleven women received free clinical breast exams prior to the panel presentations.

VPCC members found tremendous synergy generated in the volunteerism of the event’s partners. Fauquier Health System assisted with advertising the event locally and through their mail-out newsletter “Healthy Happenings”. They also provided event space, catering, assistance with set-up for exhibitors, door prizes, and take-home items for participants. Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF) representatives from Norfolk also assisted in staffing the event.

Orienting the community about these two cancers and the resources available locally for diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship made this collaboration invaluable. There were several outcomes from this event, including discussions of conducting more programs like this to address other cancers and establishing a prostate cancer support group in a more convenient location for residents of Prince Williams and Fauquier counties. VPCC believes that events such as this can be replicated in other Virginia communities.

Second Annual African American Men’s Health Forum—

The American Cancer Society will host the second annual **African American Men’s Health Forum** on February 16, 2008, at the downtown Marriott in Richmond, Virginia.

Free of charge with lunch provided, the forum will feature health education and screenings for HIV, prostate cancer, oral cancer, blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes. For more information, contact Riguey King at ACS (804-527-3773).

NEW DIRECTION *(continued from page 1)*

work will encourage thinking broadly about how public health can lead the way in eliminating health inequities.

Among its many responsibilities, the Division of Health Equity will provide assistance statewide on initiatives using the PBS “Unnatural Causes” documentary series (see sidebar on page 1). It is strongly encouraged that groups use the documentary

as a springboard for discussion, new collaboratives, and initiatives. For more information about the Division or its activities associated with the documentary, please visit the website at <http://www.vahealth.org/health-policy/healthequity/>. *CancerNotes* will provide more information on the OMHPHP in its next edition.



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This publication is available to state and local partners, health districts, and healthcare providers interested in preventing and controlling cancer in Virginia. If you have a story to share about your organization or community, please contact us.

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stabilization,” which includes making selective changes in eating and adding more physical activity. But while the needed changes are small, they are often difficult to make and stick with.

“To make these critical changes in nutrition and physical activity, most people need to develop skills and have support over a long period of time,” Winett said. “In fact, probably the best way to make these changes is to have your own personal program and coach. Fortunately, there are now ways to provide a personal program to many people through technology and the Internet.”

The goal of the “Guide-to-Health” program is to help people make healthy changes a permanent lifestyle. The program is designed to see how well a state-of-the-art Internet program helps people reach this goal and improve their health.

“There are quite a number of Internet health programs available but few have all the features of the program we have developed, and few have been really tested to see how well they work over the long-term,” Winett said.

“Guide-to-Health” is a free program. Participants must be 18-63 years of age, not physically active, and have access to the Internet. After qualifying, completing initial assessments, and enrolling in the program, participants will receive a free pedometer and scale. Individuals will then access the “Guide-to-Health” program online every week for 18 months. Weekly online coaching will take about 10-20 minutes. Two additional assessments will be given during the project.

To learn more about the “Guide-to-Health” program, or to register, visit <http://www.guide-to-health.info>.
 (Reprinted news release from Virginia Tech News; contact Catherine Doss at cdoss@vt.edu)