Dean’s Message

Dear Alumni and Friends:

It is staggering when one contemplates the impact of diabetes on our nation. The cost is great, not just financially, but in terms of lives lost and impaired quality of life.

It is of particular concern here in Oklahoma, which has seen a major increase in diabetes over the past decade. Diabetes diagnoses have doubled, with Type 2 diabetes, driven by overweight and obesity, fueling most of the increase.

Oklahoma faces a looming public health and health care crisis that demands action on several fronts. We must provide excellent treatment for those diagnosed with diabetes. However, treating this disease is not enough. We must also emphasize the promotion of health and wellness and the prevention of diabetes through programs in schools and in the workplace that prevent overweight and obesity.

The OU College of Public Health continues to serve as a leader in these prevention efforts, advancing research and preparing public health professionals for careers that further these goals.

As one of only 38 accredited colleges of public health in the country, we are home to the OU Prevention Research Center and the OU Center for American Indian Health Research. These federally funded centers focus on improved health for at-risk populations. They also serve a key role in efforts to combat the increasing prevalence of diabetes in our state and country, particularly in minority groups like American Indians, who face a disproportionately high incidence of the disease.

I take great pride in these efforts and those of our faculty, staff and students at the OU College of Public Health. I hope you enjoy our latest issue of OU Public Health magazine.

Sincerely,

Gary E. Raskob, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Public Health, OU Health Sciences Center

President’s Message

Diabetes is a disease that changes the lives of millions of children and adults. In fact, diabetes has changed my life. That is why I am so appreciative and proud of the efforts under way at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, especially in our colleges of Medicine and Public Health, to prevent, treat and hopefully, some day, cure diabetes.

Progress toward a healthier future for Oklahomans is reflected in the recent completion and current planning of several key projects on campus. Among these is the establishment of the Oklahoma Diabetes Center, where the latest treatments and care will be available to the many citizens of our state diagnosed with this disease. The center also will allow us to advance our goal of becoming a national and international leader in diabetes research, attracting additional outstanding researchers and first-class scientists and specialists to Oklahoma.

Treatment is important, but just as important is prevention. I am proud of the leadership role our College of Public Health has taken in furthering such efforts through research, education and community outreach.

At the University of Oklahoma, our public health experts, researchers, physicians and educators form a powerful team, and I believe one that stands as a formidable force in the fight against diabetes.

Sincerely,

David L. Boren
President, The University of Oklahoma
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One in five Oklahomans are uninsured and the cost of health insurance continues to rise not just for those employers who do offer insurance, but for their employees too.

Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner Kim Holland shared the sobering statistics with an audience of health professionals, students and others during Public Health Grand Rounds at the OU College of Public Health.

Holland wants to reduce the number of uninsured citizens in Oklahoma, which is an important driver of high insurance cost. The fact is those without health insurance fail to get preventive care that can help protect them from chronic disease and often seek care when ill in the most expensive venues like hospital emergency rooms. Both factors drive health care and insurance costs higher.

She explained many of the state’s uninsured are workers or dependents of workers who make too much for Medicaid coverage and aren’t yet old enough to qualify for Medicare. Finding ways to reduce insurance costs and the number of uninsured in Oklahoma was a primary goal of Holland’s first of two symposia, titled “Summit on the High Cost of Health Insurance.”

Holland, who recently won re-election and has served in her current post since January 2005, called for the health insurance summit to bring together experts from several state and national entities, including the OU College of Public Health.

“With our combined, concerted efforts we can see an improvement in these statistics,” she said. “We didn’t get here overnight and it’s not going to change overnight. But, there are lots of things going on in Oklahoma, so, yes, I think there are many reasons to be optimistic.”

The second summit was held on Nov. 9, and the information and ideas were presented to the state Legislature.

Gary Raskob, dean of the College of Public Health, participated in the summit and lauded Holland for using evidence-based policy to “do the right thing for Oklahoma in a way that cuts through any partisan politics because we really can’t afford to waste time given the problems we face.”

Holland, a former member of the Oklahoma Health Care Authority, said some of the ideas the group discussed include:

- Increasing Oklahoma’s participation in federal programs that help cover health care costs for lower-income families;
- Strengthening insurance coverage for smoking cessation programs and good health practices;
- Improving patient understanding;
- Developing a common message with other initiatives such as Strong and Healthy Oklahomans.
Oklahoma can’t afford to wait to improve the health of its citizens. That was the message Oklahoma Health Commissioner Michael Crutcher shared with a packed auditorium. His comments came on the very day a new report on obesity in America ranked Oklahoma 13th worst in the nation.

“I’m hopeful that with the right efforts and enlightened policy, and the hard work of a lot of people, we can turn around, not just the obesity issue, but the whole issue of cardiovascular health, diabetes and all of the chronic conditions that go with obesity,” Crutcher said.

Crutcher’s remarks were part of the OU Public Health Grand Rounds fall series at the OU Health Sciences Center.

Crutcher, M.D., M.P.H., told about 180 students, faculty, health professionals and members of the public that Oklahoma’s health status is slipping. Ranked 40th in overall health in 2004, according to the United Health Foundation Report, Oklahoma dropped to 44th in 2006. The report considers such statistics as smoking, health insurance coverage, prevalence of risk factors for disease, rates for cancer and cardiovascular disease and limited activity days.

The commissioner’s comments focused on deaths related to cardiovascular disease, a category in which Oklahoma now leads the nation.

There are 2,000 “excess” deaths (more than the national average) in Oklahoma each year from cardiovascular disease. Crutcher also pointed out the death rate from cardiovascular disease is higher in southeastern Oklahoma and among rural populations in the state.

He praised the state’s tax hike on cigarettes as a necessary step to reduce tobacco use in Oklahoma and ultimately deaths due to cardiovascular disease and cancer as well.

Prevention is key in reversing these negative health trends in Oklahoma, Crutcher said, and public health professionals play a vital role. He added lawmakers and public health professionals need to focus on three areas to improve the health of Oklahomans — tobacco use, exercise and nutrition.

“We are talking about things that are just tremendously difficult behaviors to change. Having a great big meal with ice cream and cake at the end of it is pleasurable. Changing that behavior is hard to do,” Crutcher said. “I hope we can.”
The University of Oklahoma College of Public Health is quickly emerging as one of the research leaders in American Indian health with projects that help address disparities in America’s native populations.

According to the federal Indian Health Service, American Indian and Alaska Native people have long experienced lower health status when compared with other Americans. Lower life expectancy and the disproportionate disease burden exist perhaps due to inadequate education, disproportionate poverty, discrimination in the delivery of health services and cultural differences.

American Indians born today have a life expectancy that is 2.4 years less than the national average. They die at higher rates than other Americans from motor vehicle crashes (229 percent higher), diabetes (189 percent higher), unintentional injuries (152 percent higher) and tuberculosis (600 percent higher), to name a few.

The Center for American Indian Health Research was created in 1992 at the College of Public Health to address these issues by pooling the expertise of OU researchers in such areas as diabetes, cardiovascular health, smoking and obesity.

The center’s research includes collaboration with three other states on the Strong Heart Study for the prevention of...
cardiovascular disease, the Stop Atherosclerosis in Native Diabetes Study (SANDS) and several health-boosting community projects through the center’s Oklahoma Native American Export Center. Researchers recently received a $3 million grant for five years to help prevent cardiovascular disease and identify specific risk factors for American Indians.

The OU Center for American Indian Health Research works with seven tribes in the Anadarko and Lawton areas in southwestern Oklahoma. The tribes are the Apache, Caddo, Comanche, Delaware, Kiowa, Ft. Sill Apache and Wichita.

Research has expanded in recent years to include other tribes such as Pawnee and Cheyenne Arapaho in eastern Oklahoma and the Navajos in Arizona.

The focus on community involvement is a key factor in the center’s success, which begins with the design and implementation of community-based research projects.

The center’s director, Elisa T. Lee, Ph.D., said researchers seek input and cooperation from community and tribal members.

Studies are submitted to an ethics committee for approval and guidance. That committee includes tribal members who are critical partners in approaching the community and tailoring studies in a way that respects cultural traditions.

“You have to respect their culture while letting them know they can prevent diabetes and control it if they get it. We want to change the mentality that diabetes is inevitable, but it’s not easy. You can’t change it overnight,” Lee said.

She offered several examples of how OU’s community-based projects have rallied a population faced with alarming diabetes rates. One example is a summer camp, developed by the center’s staff, where children learn how to eat properly and take care of their bodies. Officials expected 60 children to attend; 90 showed up.

Lee said along with gathering important data about the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and diabetes among the seven tribes, researchers also are including a component they hope will change lifestyle habits and reduce excuses for not eating right or exercising.

“You can walk, do gardening, mow the lawn,” Lee said. “We hope after they come a few times to health events they can do these activities, and we can start to make a significant difference in their lives.”

The Center for American Indian Health Research at the OU College of Public Health is home to important research projects involving the study and improvement of American Indian health. Researchers for key projects are Elisa T. Lee, Ph.D.; Carl Schaefer, Ph.D.; Everett Rhoades, M.D.; Wenyu Wang, Ph.D.; Jeunliang Yeh, Ph.D.; Ying Zhang, M.D., Ph.D.; Tauqeer Ali, M.D., Ph.D.; Fawn Yeh, Ph.D.; and Susan Xu, Ph.D.

Research projects include:

**Strong Heart Study (1988 – present)**

The Strong Heart Study is the largest multi-center study of American Indians ever undertaken by the National Institutes of Health. The data from tribes in Oklahoma, Arizona, North Dakota and South Dakota is being used to accurately measure problems linked to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Researchers found high mortality rates (mostly due to diabetes and cardiovascular disease) compared to the U.S. population as a whole. They also found high rates of cigarette smoking, obesity and peripheral arterial disease. They are now looking at genetics and the inheritance of risk factors in Phase V of the study.

**Stop Atherosclerosis in Native Diabetes Study – SANDS (2003 - present)**

This study is a five-year, multicenter, randomized clinical trial focused on cardiovascular disease prevention in American Indians and Alaska Natives with Type 2 diabetes 40 years of age and older.

**Prevention of Obesity in Early Childhood (pilot study)**

Researchers Piers Blackett, M.D., from the OU College of Medicine, and the center’s Karen Palumbo, M.Ed., and Dana Campbell-Sternlof are working on a study about breastfeeding and healthful feeding practices. Breastfed children have less risk for acute diseases in infancy and early childhood, and a reduced risk of developing childhood obesity.


In collaboration with Blackett and Stephen Glore, Ph.D., R.D., L.D., from the College of Allied Health, this study is a 29-month lifestyle intervention for overweight American Indian children to reduce their risk of diabetes.
Oklahoma Wellness Week 2007

Oklahoma is failing in health. The state ranks among the worst in the nation in cardiovascular disease, cancer deaths, infant mortality, smoking and in the number of uninsured. The rate of obesity has more than doubled since 1990, and the state now leads the nation in cardiovascular deaths.

Overall, the latest report by the United Health Foundation shows a decline in Oklahoma’s health outcomes despite efforts to reverse the trend.

“Treating disease is important, but it is clear that positive change also requires a strong effort in the area of prevention,” said Gary Raskob, dean of the OU College of Public Health.

As part of that effort, numerous Oklahoma companies, organizations and agencies are joining forces again this year to spread the word about the importance of wellness and a healthful lifestyle.

Business, government, academics and others will combine their expertise to bring the message of prevention to the public during Oklahoma Wellness Week 2007, which runs from April 2 to 7. The week’s activities include a health fair, speakers and other events aimed at preventing health problems before they arise.

Oklahoma Wellness Week will kick start with the Total Health Expo. This is the second year for the expo, which is sponsored by The Oklahoman, Central Oklahoma Turning Point, the College of Public Health and others. The free health fair offers wellness tests such as blood pressure and bone density checks.

Sue Hale, executive editor of The Oklahoman and co-chair of Central Oklahoma Turning Point, said this year more exhibitors will be at the expo, which is to be held the Saturday preceding Wellness Week, March 31, at the Coca Cola Bricktown Event Center in downtown Oklahoma City. Admission is free.

“The best way to promote a healthy lifestyle for all Oklahomans is for businesses and agencies to come together in events like this. Businesses are realizing that if they can help their employees become healthier, it will cut health insurance costs and improve the lifestyle of those employees,” Hale said. “Last year, several thousand people visited the fitness event and picked up information on everything from nutrition to home health care.”

As part of Wellness Week, the OU College of Public Health also is hosting a series of Public Health Grand Rounds aimed at raising public awareness of important issues related to wellness and prevention. Speakers include: Stephen Hanson, executive vice president of operations and management at Texas Health Resources; James W. Curran, M.D., M.P.H., dean of the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University; Ken Lackey, president and chief executive of The Nordam Group in Tulsa; and Karen Goralesski, executive director, Paul G. Rogers Society for Global Health Research, Research!America.

Goralesski will speak about the new politics of public health and how those involved in public health need to raise awareness about their research. Her presentation also will touch upon the need to increase funding to preventive health research. Nationally, only one cent of every health dollar is spent on prevention and public health research.

“That’s a minuscule amount. That one penny is supposed to protect people from new and emerging diseases,” Goralesski said. “That level of investment is clearly inadequate.”

To remedy this situation, she added that policy makers and their constituents must be informed about the important role public health research plays in people’s daily lives.

“Faculty, students and researchers need new skills to effectively communicate to lawmakers and citizens the value of public health,” Goralesski said.
In the wake of disaster, public health experts know having a well-developed preparedness plan can make all the difference. With that in mind, the American Public Health Association has made emergency response and preparedness the focus of National Public Health Week this year.

National Public Health Week is April 2 to 8, 2007. It is titled “Take the First Steps! Preparedness and Public Health Threats: Addressing the Unique Needs of the Nation’s Vulnerable Populations.”

Preparedness is an area in which the OU College of Public Health has taken a lead in Oklahoma, the region and nationwide. The college is home to two federally funded centers focused on preparedness. The Southwest Center for Public Health Preparedness helps to prepare the public health workforce to respond to bioterrorism and emerging health threats. The Center for Biosecurity Research advances research in biotechnology and biosciences to enhance national security. The college’s dean, Gary Raskob, also serves as chairman of a national consultation committee on preparedness for the Association of Schools of Public Health and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“Preparedness starts at home in each family,” Raskob said. “It makes sense for everyone to have a basic understanding of fundamental preparedness concepts and to take steps to ensure they are properly prepared for emergencies.”

Organizers of this year’s National Public Health Week say the aftermath of both the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and Hurricane Katrina helped raise the public's awareness of the need for disaster preparedness.

Several College of Public Health faculty members traveled to the Houston Astrodome and were on hand to lend their training and expertise to relief efforts on behalf of Hurricane Katrina evacuees in September of 2005.

“It was overwhelming in the sense that the whole region of the Gulf Coast had been so dramatically impacted,” said Dan Boatright, Ph.D., associate dean for Public Health Practice, who led the OU team of five in Houston. “To respond and provide everything needed to sustain those displaced was a major task.”

As part of National Public Health Week 2007, APHA will address the preparedness needs of five special subgroups vulnerable during a threat — mothers with children living in the household, local food banks, hourly workers and employers, schools serving children in kindergarten through grade 12, and individuals with chronic health care needs such as diabetes, asthma, cancer and high blood pressure.

Organizers hope the week will inspire all Americans to take that first, but vital, step toward being better prepared for emergencies.

For more information on the college’s role in public health preparedness, visit www.swcphp.ouhsc.edu.

For more information on National Public Health Week, visit www.nphw.org.
Public Health:

A Student’s Perspective

Like many American Indian children, Robin Kinnard thought diabetes was an inevitable part of growing older. The evidence was all around her.

She didn’t know as a child that the disease had a name, but she knew her grandmother had sores on her hands and feet. Her grandfather had to give her wife shots. Her grandmother died at age 63.

By the time Kinnard was in high school in Virginia she knew about this menace that was spreading among her native population and wanted to help. Her interest in biology and medicine, as well as some gentle nudging from co-workers at the Indian Health Service national headquarters, led to a career in public health.

While her father’s family is from the Crow Reservation in Montana, her mother is a Kiowa from Oklahoma. The chance to be close to cousins drew Kinnard to the University of Oklahoma, where she earned a bachelor’s degree in microbiology and a master’s degree in health administration at the College of Public Health. She is the latest recipient of the Edmund H. Gleason Family Scholarship.

Kinnard, 37, is now working on her doctor of public health degree while serving the college as its Native American outreach coordinator. Her job is to recruit American Indian students into public health as part of the college’s Strategic Plan.

Her goal and that of the college is to bring more American Indian students into the field of public health. They know these students will become the professionals who return to serve communities where they grew up, well-versed in the cultural nuances of those communities and well-trained to help meet their public health needs. The college has set a goal to increase the number of American Indian students enrolled to at least 15 percent of its student body by 2010.

Kinnard said while non-Indian researchers are doing amazing work with several tribes in Oklahoma, people tend to listen to researchers who share their cultural heritage. She wants American Indian students to become public health professionals so they can go back to their communities and spread the message that diabetes is not a “destiny.”

“If I can get out there and teach them about preventing it or delaying it five to 10 years, that’s one of the things I want to do,” she said.

“Health affects your quality of life, and the health status of the American Indian community is lagging behind.”

Kinnard also is driven personally to combat the disease. In addition to her grandmother’s diagnosis and subsequent death as a result of complications from diabetes, her father and uncle have now been diagnosed with diabetes, as have her husband’s parents.

As she strives for broad-based community changes to stem the rising tide of diabetes, she also is focused on effecting changes at home in an effort to protect her own family from the disease. Kinnard and her husband now walk several times a week and she has explained the consequences of the disease to her 11-year-old daughter — something she hopes other American Indian families will do.

“I talk to her all of the time about exercising and eating right,” Kinnard said. “You can’t wait until you’re 50 to wake up and do something. By then, a lot of the disease processes have started. You only have one body. Take care of it.”
Gleason Family Scholarship

Edmund H. Gleason planned to be a medical doctor like others in his family, but when his personal responsibilities changed, he sought guidance for a different career.

According to his daughter, Gleason received excellent advice from his academic adviser at the University of Oklahoma. The adviser recognized Gleason’s interest in health and prevention, and recommended he find out about a new degree at the university in public health.

Gleason did just that and found his life’s work. He received the first public health degree — a bachelor of science degree in public health and sanitation — at OU. To honor the opportunity OU gave him, Gleason’s family endowed a memorial scholarship in his name.

The Edmund H. Gleason Family Scholarship provides funds for College of Public Health students who are members of underserved populations.

Gleason’s daughter, Sandra Gleason, Ph.D., thought of the scholarship idea to honor her father because she knew from her work that a scholarship can mean a great deal for students and their education.

“Both of my parents have been strong advocates of education, and it was clear when I was growing up that I was going to college because they both considered that to be very, very important,” Sandra Gleason said.

Sandra Gleason’s mother, Bonnie Gleason Dean, said she wants the scholarship to help students who might not be able to reach their goals without financial assistance.

“I was raised in Greer County. We were farmers and it took a lot to be able to go to school,” she said.

“These kids today, who I talk to, put themselves through school and have $30,000 in debt. They are the ones who need the help — the ones with the desire and the willingness to stay with it. I just feel like that’s where the assistance should go. So, if our little bit can help, I am all for it.”

Sandra Gleason said her father would have been pleased with the two recipients of the scholarship — Robin Kinnard (2006) and Valerie Jernigan (2002).

“They are both very impressive women who are going to make a difference in the world.”

BIOS

Edmund H. Gleason

Hometown: Sudbury, Mass.

Education: Master of Public Health, University of California, Berkeley (1958); Bachelor of Science degree in public health, University of Oklahoma (1949).

Military service: U.S. Navy: Officer-in-Charge 2nd Preventive Medicine Section, 2nd Marine Div. (1951); center sanitation officer, Naval Training Center (1953); training and publications officer, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (1957); U.S. Navy public health officer, Naples, Italy (1963); head of the Environmental Health Division, National Naval Medical Center (1966); preventative medicine officer, First Marine Div., Vietnam (1968); environmental health officer, Naval Training Center, Orlando, Fla. (retired 1970).


Bonnie Gleason Dean

Hometown: Mangum, Okla.; Winter Park, Fla.

Family: Sandra Gleason (daughter); married to retired U.S. Navy Capt. Jerdon (Jerry) Dean.

Professional: Worked at Tinker Air Force Base during World War II.

Sandra E. Gleason

Education: Doctorate in economics, Michigan State University; master’s degree in economics, Northwestern University; bachelor’s degree in economics, Smith College, cum laude.

Professional: Associate Dean for Faculty and Research in the Office of the Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses at The Pennsylvania State University.
PUBLIC HEALTH

IN ACTION

University of Oklahoma College of Public Health

DIABETES PREVENTION
Preventing Diabetes

June Eichner, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., director of the OU Prevention Research Center, and Bill Moore, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., associate director of the center

It is a health crisis for a community and school district where more than 60 percent of students are American Indian. Poor eating and exercise habits are contributing to a high rate of obesity and Type 2 diabetes in both adults and teenagers.

Epidemiologists Bill Moore, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., and June Eichner, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., from the OU Prevention Research Center at the college learned of the challenges and developed a prevention program for Anadarko schools that includes walking, body mass index measurements and nutritional information.

“A lot of this is convincing people they can live a healthier life and that it will pay off in the end,” said Eichner, director of the OU Prevention Research Center. “We have changed their view about health and we’d like to spread that to other schools.”

The OU Prevention Research Center is one of 33 funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Its main focus is to improve the health of Oklahoma’s American Indian population, but its programs benefit a variety of groups, including Anadarko’s growing Hispanic, black and Vietnamese populations. Anadarko is a rural town about 60 miles southwest of Oklahoma City.

To test their program, Moore and Eichner targeted an elective class at Anadarko High School where students participated in mostly sedentary activities.

Moore changed the leisure class to a walking class. He said some students were reluctant at first, but with persistence nearly all of the students realized the benefit.

When researchers from the University of Oklahoma College of Public Health asked students in an Anadarko classroom how many of them had a family member with diabetes, nearly every child raised his or her hand.
“I went every day to walk with them,” Moore said. The new TRAILS program requires students to walk two miles every day in the high school and one mile a day in the middle school. Researchers also survey students for height, weight and body mass index as part of the related Healthy Kids Project.

According to the first research report from the project, published in October, about 30 percent of Anadarko’s high school students are overweight. The percentage is slightly higher in middle school and slightly lower in elementary school. Nearly half are overweight or “at risk” of being overweight.

OU Prevention Research Center faculty and staff hope to change that trend.

Since the first walking class in 2002, Moore, Eichner and prevention center staff members Aietah Stephens, Terry Wilson and Wesley Wilson have walked with students, participated in health days at the middle school and attended high school sporting events to get to know the community.

The results from the first class were dramatic with students losing significant weight and lowering their body mass index.

The practice of improved health also has extended beyond the walking classes. School administrators removed the vending machine from the elementary school and added more fruits and vegetables to school lunch menus. Administrators, teachers and staff members also asked to be a part of the program. At least one staff member lost 40 pounds and the superintendent gave up his morning snack cakes.

The program has reached more than 2,000 students in Anadarko. Moore calls that a step in the right direction. However, he would like to see the class become a required course at Anadarko High School, as opposed to an elective, to reach even more young people and have a greater impact.

“We want to reach them before they develop those bad habits,” said Eichner.

“People can change at any age, but we just think the earlier the easier. We are trying to make them realize they have control over their health. A lot of them think they have to get diabetes. We want to change that thinking and positively impact their future health.”

Diabetes Prevention Begins with YOU!

Nate Jackson, 16, Josh German, 18, and Torrey Goombi, 18, participate in the Walking Class at Anadarko High School.

Diabetes is a preventable disease for most people. Obesity, poor diet and lack of exercise raise your risk. Your family history is the only risk factor you can’t control.

To reduce your risk of Type 2 diabetes, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following activities:

• Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity at work or at home on most days of the week. For children and adolescents, engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity.
• Walk two miles in 30 minutes on most days of the week.
• Reduce television viewing time to less than two hours a day.
• Consume at least three servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit per day.
• Make half of your grains whole and eat lean meat.
• Resign from the “clean your plate club.”
• Promote breastfeeding. Breastfed children have less risk for acute diseases of infancy and early childhood, and a reduced risk of developing childhood obesity.
Gregory Pyle, chief of the Choctaw Nation, is the only sibling in his family without diabetes. His personal drive to prevent diabetes has intensified his quest to significantly reduce the number of American Indian people diagnosed with the disease.

“Diabetes is one of the issues that’s reaching epidemic proportions, not just in Indian tribes but across the United States,” Pyle said.

“Unfortunately, the average person has diabetes for five to 10 years before they are diagnosed with it. We want to recognize this as soon as possible because it creates so many other areas of concern — the heart, vision, limbs.”

Pyle estimates that about 30 percent to 35 percent of Choctaw Tribe members are diabetic.

To reverse the trend, the tribe built a new diabetes clinic, offers free salad bars and health fairs at its 17 community centers, provides exercise equipment and classes, and has created a partnership with the OU College of Public Health for research and community involvement. The tribe also offers children’s camps to provide facts about exercise and nutrition.

Pyle decided to try the new ideas himself and started exercising. He lost eight pounds and his total cholesterol level dropped from 230 to 199.

“People were coming up to me a year or two later and saying ‘You were walking so we started walking.’ It’s amazing. Doing things by example is what we are talking about.”

Collaboration is at the heart of an expansive, multidisciplinary project that addresses diabetes in American Indian populations.

Neil Henderson, Ph.D., of the OU College of Public Health, is principal investigator on the proposed project, which draws on the expertise of researchers from the University of Oklahoma colleges of Public Health, Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health on the OU Health Sciences Center campus in Oklahoma City, as well as the OU College of Arts and Sciences in Norman.

“They wanted a multidisciplinary attack on diabetes – not just medical or social science,” Henderson said.

Co-principal investigator on the project is Timothy Lyons, M.D., an endocrinology and diabetes specialist at the OU College of Medicine. Lyons has been at the OU Health Sciences Center for four years and is working to build a diabetes center in Oklahoma.

“The collaborative effort won’t just help, it’s essential because the problem of diabetes among American Indians is so complex,” Lyons said. “We could not hope to defeat the problem without this type of approach.”

The proposal has three main components: research, community engagement and training those who work for tribes to conduct basic research, Henderson said. The Choctaw, Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes are involved with the project. A few aspects that the research will focus on include: pre-gestational diabetes; the higher prevalence of inflammatory diseases in American Indians and how that interferes with diabetes treatment; and interviews with both patients and health care providers to gauge their personal beliefs about the causes of diabetes.

Four pilot programs also are connected to the project. The grant is offered through the National Institutes of Health and, if received, funds for the project will be awarded in 2008.

“This process will create cross-cutting communication, awareness and a network of professionals,” Henderson said. “All for the outcome of American Indians having a better quality of life.”
A
fter the degrees have been granted and caps thrown in the
air, the real work of finding a job begins for most students.

The job hunt didn’t last long for one recent OU College of
Public Health alumna.

The morning after Hazel Lonewolf graduated, she stepped into
her new office. Lonewolf’s research at the college led her directly to
a job; no extended searching required.

“I’m lucky that I landed a job as a direct result of my practicum,”
Lonewolf said. “One thing led directly to another.”

The 25-year-old Lonewolf, M.P.H., currently works in the Indian
Health Service’s Oklahoma City office. A member of the Kiowa
tribe, she had always known she wanted to work with American
Indians as part of her job.

“Public health was a great fit,” Lonewolf said. “I’m able to do
what I always wanted to do and help American Indians gain better
access to health care. It’s very rewarding.”

Her duties at Indian Health Services are varied. They include
collecting data on patient admissions and discharges as well as
ambulatory patient visits. She analyzes the data using spreadsheets and
mapping tools to show which places may need health care services.

Her job grew out of her work with the same information as part
of her practicum while earning her master of public health degree
at the College of Public Health.

Lonewolf’s educational journey took her from the prairies of
Oklahoma, where she graduated from Anadarko High School, to
the Ivy League. For her undergraduate studies, Lonewolf debated
between Dartmouth and Stanford University in California, but
after a visit to the East Coast college, and high praise from a
cousin who also attended the school, Dartmouth won out. She
earned her undergraduate degrees there in government and
Native American Studies.

When Lonewolf decided she wanted to continue her education
there was no debate, though. The University of Oklahoma College
of Public Health was the sole contender.

“Everything seemed to fit with what I wanted to do and achieve,”
Lonewolf said. “There was really no need to look anywhere else.”

Join the College of Public Health Alumni Association

For an application or for more information about
upcoming Alumni Association events, click on the
Alumni tab at www.coph.ouhsc.edu/coph. For other
membership information, contact Vivian Glore at
(405) 271-2700 or by e-mail at Vivian-Glore@ouhsc.edu.
Neil Henderson took his first steps toward his career in research with his eyes closed tight in the middle of the woods.

When he was a small child, his grandfather, a Cherokee Indian, took Henderson and his brother into the forests near Sulphur, Okla. He had the boys sit and listen to the sounds as he explained what was making them.

“He wanted us to learn to see without our eyes,” Henderson recalls.

Henderson’s mother, who is a member of the Choctaw Nation, also encouraged her son to investigate his surroundings, sometimes even stopping to examine a dead animal to see if they could figure out what it ate.

“The combination of those things stuck with me,” Henderson said. “I became interested in a broad range of topics and was eventually led into the field of medical anthropology.”

Henderson, himself a Choctaw, is able to combine his hereditary curiosity and his understanding of the American Indian culture with his work and research at the OU College of Public Health. Henderson, Ph.D., is currently involved with several projects that address health challenges in the American Indian population such as diabetes, dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

American Indians are dying earlier than any other population, Henderson said. With his insight into the ways of American Indians, he hopes to be able to combine new research techniques in ways that are culturally understandable with a goal of effecting positive change.

“We see the Indian populations making advances in business and other areas, but there is still a cultural life for them,” Henderson said.

He pointed to the example of the new Choctaw National Hospital, a sophisticated surgical and biomedical facility. Within a few miles of the state-of-the-art hospital are at least seven traditional sweat lodges, Henderson said.

Neil Henderson’s American Indian heritage remains an important part of who he is. It also plays an important role in his current research.

His work relies heavily on a strong partnership with the Choctaw Nation. Through this partnership, Choctaw leaders have helped Henderson gain access to Choctaw people and facilities to supplement his research. Choctaw Nation Chief Gregory E. Pyle has been instrumental in fostering the union, Henderson said.

A large portion of Henderson’s research at the College of Public Health has focused on dementia and Alzheimer’s in American Indians. With his expertise, Henderson currently serves on two national committees – the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s new taskforce on brain health and the National Committee on Alzheimer’s Disease and Minorities.

Henderson also is actively involved in reducing health disparities, particularly for American Indians and other minority populations in Oklahoma. A new grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation helps fuel these efforts in the area of diabetes. Henderson’s wife, Carson Henderson, joins him in this important research effort. Carson Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.N., is an assistant professor of research in Health Promotion Sciences at the College of Public Health. Their proposal was chosen over more than 170 others following an intense selection process that included a daylong site visit.

“We think we have an innovative way of improving the health disparity among American Indians,” Neil Henderson said of the project. “My wife and I have different viewpoints and the end result is an improved product. We’re very grateful for the opportunity to work together.”

Diabetes is more prevalent among American Indians than any other population. Socio-economic status may play a role. However, he said another theory points to the prevalence of a “thirsty gene” that stores nutrients or sugars in case of famine.

“For thousands of years, the exposure to refined sugars was zero. Old pictures from the late 1800s show American Indians at a normal weight. Then there was an overnight change,” Henderson said. “There are benefits to civilization; but in this case, it was harmful.”

For Neil Henderson, the journey of inquiry has come full circle. The culture and ways that inspired him to pursue a career in public health research now benefit from the information he discovers.

“All the details dovetail for an outcome that means a better quality of life for American Indians,” he said.
Improved Health for Youth

A SHARED VISION FOR COX COMMUNICATIONS AND COLLEGE

When Tim Tippit met with Dean Gary Raskob and OU College of Public Health alumna Leslie Hudson, he realized they shared a vision.

The vice president of government relations and public affairs at Cox Communications saw an opportunity. The college had already enlisted the help of OU head football coach Bob Stoops to create a public service announcement aimed at improving the health of Oklahoma youth.

Tippit knew there was a natural fit between the college and Cox Communications. Both were committed to the goal of promoting healthier youth. The college had a plan in motion already and Cox Communications could help expand that message in hopes of boosting overall health in Oklahoma.

“If it’s not part of a more comprehensive project, then kids are back on the couch with their snack foods,” Tippit said, adding that the problems the college hopes to address will not change overnight.

“Poor health habits are acquired over the course of years and are often multigenerational in families. So these are issues that will change over time. We are going to work with the College of Public Health to get kids to eat more healthful foods, to exercise more and to not smoke. Maybe they will grow up and then raise their kids that way. It’s a better chance to change attitudes and improve health long term.”

The collaboration between Cox Communications and the OU College of Public Health is already carrying this message to a massive audience. The public service announcement featuring Stoops has aired thousands of times on a multitude of channels as a result of Cox’s commitment to the effort.

Tippit and the more than 20 other community and business leaders on the college’s advisory board hope to be able to encourage other Oklahoma “celebrities” to lend their voices to delivering important messages about healthful living to all Oklahomans.

“I moved back here after being out of state many, many years and I want to do what I can to help this state; to help make this state better, more attractive for business, a better place to raise our children. We have a lot of opportunity here and sometimes we don’t know how good we have it. We can show how good it is and help make it even better,” Tippit said.

“We are tickled to death to be tied to the OU College of Public Health. It’s a tremendous opportunity for us. This is a perfect example of a partnership being formed to address a problem that is widespread. They (the college) are the experts in Oklahoma, so let’s cooperate to do something about this problem.”
“Improving public health is vital. Poor health leads to high medical costs and prevents many Oklahomans from living life to its fullest. Treating disease is important. However, positive change requires a commitment to prevention and to changing public behaviors like smoking, poor nutrition and lack of exercise that clearly threaten overall public health. The College of Public Health plays a critical role in this regard. Its advisory board creates an important dialogue with business, government and community leaders to help guide programs and research at the college as well as to find and implement effective solutions to the public health problems facing our state.”

“After my first meeting, I realized you have the top corporate, the top health people in the state of Oklahoma interacting back and forth. Also, there is a cross section of the state – urban and rural, so we hope to have a lot of new ideas that we can interject into our system in southeast Oklahoma.”

“Many of the benefits we realize today from public health policies are under-recognized or unappreciated. Yet our quality of life, from the water we drink and the air we breathe, to sanitary practices and immunizations which prevent or eliminate disease and illness, has been profoundly improved, each and every day, by public health practices. The advisory board represents a sampling of individuals who share a passion and commitment to improve the quality of life for Oklahomans through the leadership of the College of Public Health.”

* Cline was recently chosen by President Bush to serve as the head of the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The OU College of Public Health wishes him well and thanks him for his service to the college’s advisory board.
Excellence Endowed

Peter Budetti has found a home at the OU College of Public Health. It was the prestige and commitment of an endowed chair that most attracted him to the college and the state.

Budetti, M.D., J.D., is the first endowed chair in a program Dean Gary Raskob hopes to expand 10-fold in an effort to attract even more leaders in public health to the college.

“It’s a distinction to hold an endowed chair and it’s one in academic circles that has some stature attached to it. It’s a very important step in the college’s development, and Gary (Raskob) has positioned the college to be one of the most recognized in the country,” Budetti said.

Before joining OU, Budetti was chosen by President Clinton to serve on the core legislative drafting group for the president’s Health Security Act in 1993 and worked with Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., on the U.S. House of Representatives’ Subcommittee on Health and the Environment. He came to OU from Northwestern University in 2003 as the Edward E. and Helen T. Bartlett Foundation Professor of Public Health.

The number of endowed chairs should increase under the guidance of the college’s Strategic Plan. The plan calls for at least 10 endowed chairs in the College of Public Health by 2010.

“The endowed chairs program allows us to continue to attract top public health educators and researchers to the college,” Raskob said. “The Bartlett name brings honor and prestige to the program. The University of Oklahoma is already a leader in public health education and research. The endowed chairs will provide the impetus for expanding excellence at the college.”

Budetti said donors should consider supporting an endowed chair because it has a tremendous impact on the college, its students and the university’s national reputation.

Every time he writes a research paper, Budetti said, it carries the Bartlett Foundation’s name and promotes OU as a first-rate college of public health.

“In my case, I took it as a very strong sign in the college that the community resources were willing to work with the dean to create an endowed chair that I could fill. That was a sign that the college was interested in recruiting me and that was impressive,” Budetti said. “It was a sign of the commitment.”

BARTLETT FOUNDATION

The Edward E. and Helen T. Bartlett Foundation was created to fund educational and community projects in Sapulpa and throughout Oklahoma. The foundation supports several programs within Sapulpa Public Schools, including band, vocal music, art, debate and an elementary program on Saturdays that provides additional instruction in math and reading.

The Bartlett Foundation has provided four-year scholarships to Sapulpa High School graduating seniors since the mid-1960s. Two scholarships are awarded each year to students enrolling at OU and three other Oklahoma universities. The endowment at the OU College of Public Health is one of only two awarded to universities by the foundation.

Created in 1963 through the estate of Edward and Helen Bartlett, the Bartlett Foundation is run by a board of trustees.

Edward Bartlett was a successful businessman most known for his glassware company called Bartlett-Collins Company Inc. in Sapulpa, which was started by his father H.U. Bartlett in about 1912. The company is now a division of Indiana Glass.
The constantly changing field of public health keeps accountant Linda Hutton busy and engaged.

Hutton, who came to the OU College of Public Health in 1989, serves as an accountant in the college’s Office of Financial Services. She deals with payroll and the reconciliation of foundation accounts as well as assisting the dean’s office in making sure all expenses are paid and reimbursed, and items get purchased. All of this is accomplished while staff members adjust to a new streamlined system at the college that has one office overseeing finances instead of every department having their own financial staff.

Hutton, who is an avid gardener, stumbled onto her job after taking the advice of a former co-worker who said she should apply at a place she knew little about — the OU Health Sciences Center.

“When I came to the College of Public Health to be interviewed, the business manager was very pleasant and I thought it would be an opportune time for change,” she said.

For more than 17 years Hutton has been a witness to the extraordinary change at the college, and according to Dean Gary Raskob, she is an integral part of the transformation. The college has seen a tremendous boost in research funding in recent years and also has become a leader in public health education and research.

“Without her dedicated work year in and year out, we wouldn’t be able to make all of this positive change,” Raskob said.

Hutton’s former supervisor Chris Tackett said Hutton is reliable, conscientious, dedicated and a wonderful resource for the office in her interactions with faculty, staff, students, vendors and other campus personnel.

“Her calm demeanor and professionalism make her an excellent fit at the college,” said Tackett, the interim assistant dean for finance at the College of Public Health.

“Whenever I give Linda a project to do — whether big or small — I know she will ensure that she understands the requirements and then see it through to completion. Linda’s great to work with and is a valued member of our team.”

Hutton has learned a lot about health and prevention over the years. At the encouragement of Dean Gary Raskob, she attends Public Health Grand Rounds, which feature health experts from around the country, and she pays close attention to public health news.

“You just hear more on the news about the phrase public health and the state of the nation’s health,” Hutton said. “I think it is a good time for the college to step out and educate people on public health issues and let them know what we are all about.”

Participating in Positive Change

Linda Hutton, Office of Financial Services
News and Views

OU Professors Receive Robert Wood Johnson Grant

Researchers at the OU College of Public Health have received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Principal investigator Carson Henderson, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.N., and co-investigator Neil Henderson, Ph.D., were awarded the grant to study ways to reduce health disparities, particularly for American Indians and other minority populations in Oklahoma. Their research will focus on diabetes. The grant was awarded after a very selective process. More than 170 proposals were narrowed down to 16. Those entrants received site visits. Neil Henderson said the grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is very prestigious for the college.

“I appreciate the mentorship of our professors and their continuous dedication to our professional development.”

Student Lindsey Mongold, 24, works on a project at the OU College of Public Health. Lindsey is working toward a master’s degree in health administration and policy.

Students Thomas John (foreground), 39, and Adam McGann, 27, go over study material while waiting for their health quality management class to begin at the College of Public Health.

“It’s been a great experience. It’s afforded me many opportunities in my future career development.”

Student Lindsey Harris, 24, formulates spread sheets for a project at the College of Public Health. Lindsey is working toward a master’s degree in health administration and policy.
Collaborating for Improved Health

The Oklahoma and Tulsa city-county health departments play a vital role in the health of Oklahomans, and the directors of both say their collaboration with the OU College of Public Health is key. 

“The delivery of public health services in any community is optimal when all parts of the ‘public health system’ are working in concert. There is no better example of this type of unity and collaboration than in the strong relationship that has been developed between the OU College of Public Health, the Oklahoma State Health Department and the two metro city-county health departments in Tulsa and Oklahoma City,” said Paul Dungan, D.V.M., M.P.H., director of the Oklahoma City-County Health Department.

“The significant public health problems we face here in Oklahoma and the new threats from terrorism that we all face make it imperative that public health research, the training of public health practitioners, and the delivery of public health services become an indistinguishable continuum of organized effort.”

Gary Cox, J.D., director of the Tulsa City-County Health Department, said the collaboration is not only important in improving and maintaining the health of Oklahomans, but also for the production of quality graduates well-prepared for their careers in public health.

“This is particularly important since over half of our current workforce will be eligible for retirement within the next five years,” Cox explained.

“The goal of improving the health of Oklahomans is a major challenge and the OU College of Public Health is an essential partner in this important effort,” he said, adding that these strong collaborative ties help further the common goal of improved health for all Oklahomans.

Oklahoma’s two largest county health departments have joined with the College of Public Health in an effort to improve the state’s health status.

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<th>COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH GRANT FUNDING SOARS: 2002-2006</th>
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<td><strong>Total Grant Funding</strong></td>
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Recent Events

January
30

February
15

27
Public Health Grand Rounds, “From Research to Practice: The Experience of the Prevention Research Centers Program of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,” featuring Eduardo Simoes, M.D., Ph.D., M.P.H., director, Prevention Research Centers Program, Division of Adult and Community Health, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

27 through March 1
Pfizer’s Milestones in Public Health Exhibit.

March
1
Public Health Grand Rounds, “Do You Have a Good Public Health Agency?” featuring James Marks, M.D., M.P.H., senior vice president and director, Health Group, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

College of Public Health Alumni Association annual meeting, Petroleum Club of Edmond, 1 N. Sooner Road, Edmond.

Upcoming Events

March
13
Public Health Grand Rounds, “Death by Disproportion: The Health and Economic Consequences of Misplaced Priorities,” featuring Steven H. Woolf, M.D., M.P.H., professor, Department of Family Medicine, Department of Epidemiology and Community Health, Medical College of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., CHB 150.

31
Oklahoma Health Fair, Bricktown, Oklahoma City. This is the kick-off event for 2007 Oklahoma Wellness/National Public Health Week.

April
2 through 7
Oklahoma Wellness Week and National Public Health Week.

2
Public Health Grand Rounds, “Thirty Years as an Oklahoma M.P.H. — The Difference It Has Made,” featuring Stephen Hanson (OU ’76 M.P.H.), executive vice president of Operations and Management, Texas Health Resources, Fort Worth, Texas, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., CHB 320. Hanson’s presentation will be the 2007 Delta Omega Society Distinguished Lecture in Public Health.

3
Public Health Grand Rounds, “HIV/AIDS: The First 25 Years,” featuring James W. Curran, M.D., M.P.H., dean, Rollins School of Public Health, Emory University, and former assistant surgeon general, U.S. Public Health Service, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., CHB 150. Dr. Curran will be the recipient of the college’s 2007 O. Ray Kling Distinguished Lecture in International Health.
April (continued)

4

5
Public Health Grand Rounds, “A Corporate Initiative for Reducing Health Care Costs,” featuring Ken Lackey, president and CEO, Nordam Group, Tulsa, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., CHB 150.

Grapes of Health Event, Presbyterian Health Foundation Pavilion, 5 to 7 p.m., 825 Research Parkway, Oklahoma City.

19
College of Public Health Advisory Board meeting.

Public Health Grand Rounds, “Efficiency and Value in Health Care,” featuring Harvey Fineberg, M.D., Ph.D., president, Institute of Medicine, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., CHB 150.

May

11
University of Oklahoma Commencement.

12
College of Public Health convocation with Charles Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A., director, Indian Health Service, as the 2007 convocation speaker.

For additional information, visit the College of Public Health Web site at www.ouhsc.edu or contact Vivian Glore, assistant dean, Alumni Affairs and Community Relations, at (405) 271-2700 or e-mail Vivian-Glore@ouhsc.edu.

CLASS NOTES

2000
Codispoti, Catherine R. (’06 M.H.A.), is an administrative fellow at Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston.

Ndifor, Joseph M. (’05 M.P.H. Epidemiology), is a senior health-planning specialist at the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

West, Taryn (’06 M.P.H. Health Promotion), is working as the Healthy@Work Coordinator for the Multicare Center for Healthy Living in Tacoma, Wash. She assists companies with worksite wellness programming and also is developing a wellness program for Multicare’s 5,000 employees.

1980
Gifford, Jeffery W. (’89 M.S. Industrial Hygiene), recently returned to Oklahoma and accepted a position with OGE-ENOGEX as the manager of environmental health and safety.

Arnedos, Thomas A. (’74 M.P.H. Environmental Health), has been appointed as an assistant director of the Palm Beach County Health Department, headquartered in West Palm Beach, Fla.

Todd, John G. (’70 Ph.D.), has retired from the U.S. Public Health Service. He worked in Indian Health Service as a health care administrator and assistant surgeon general.

Send your news for Class Notes to Vivian Glore at Vivian-Glore@ouhsc.edu.

1990
Pankratz, Melinda (’95 M.P.H.), welcomed daughter Chloe Jane into the world on Oct. 23, 2006.
The untitled works on the front and back covers are award-winning watercolor paintings by artist Norma Howard. Howard, a Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian, lives in Stigler, Okla., and is a registered artist with the Choctaw Nation. She has taken top honors at the famous Indian Market in Santa Fe, N.M., receiving the Best in Painting award in 2001. Her unique basket-weave brushstrokes add vibrant depth of color rarely seen in watercolors, and has made her a favorite of collectors. Her work was chosen to represent the Indian culture that is the focus of several diabetes prevention research projects currently under way at the OU College of Public Health. The research aims to improve the health status of those populations at greatest risk for diabetes, especially American Indians.