



# News from the

## Center for Alaska Native Health Research

Building and increasing research capacity to improve the health of Alaska Natives.

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### Participatory Research Underway at the Center

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At the Center for Alaska Native Health Research, participatory research has become the standard for researching health issues in rural Alaskan communities. In participatory research, groups involved with and impacted by the study take part in the research process, beginning with identifying the research objectives

and ending with shaping the presentation and dissemination of the research results and findings. This process of shaping and sharing research results with the communities involves locals, cultural experts, and researchers. All groups must have input in the final form of the community research presentation, including input in the content, language, style, and the manner of presentation in the village. For example, a more mainstream academic way of presenting results may

*Participatory research has become the standard for researching health issues in rural Alaskan communities.*

contain terms, concepts, and graphical representations of numbers that do not capture how local communities understand such information. In participatory research, the researchers, cultural experts, and communities have equal input in the information contained and the form through which it is conveyed.

Augusto Legaspi, Ph.D., is helping to create a culturally appropriate template for the presentation of the CANHR research to the participating villages. This aspect began in spring 2004, and the researchers are now presenting the initial results. The entire process starts with the principal investigators and cultural experts going over the draft presentations, commenting on the content, identifying important concepts, and translating those concepts and terms into a presentation that has the organization, presentation style, and graphics that can be easily understood by participating Yup'ik and Cup'ik communities.

According to Dr. Legaspi, this process initially sounded easier than it was. "From June to December, we had a lot of review and practice runs of the presentation and made numerous changes along the way. Several times we thought we had the final version only to come across necessary changes during practice runs."

*(Continued p.3)*



Eliza Orr

A Publication of the University of Alaska





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## The University of Alaska Joins the International Journal of Circumpolar Health Publishers Board

The International Journal for Circumpolar Health (IJCH) highlights specific aspects of health and well being of circumpolar populations. As a means of advancing research in this area, the Journal disseminates valuable scientific and practical information on circumpolar people for specialists and others interested in international health and social welfare issues.

The IJCH was established in 1973 by the Nordic Council for Arctic Medical Research, and for many years operated under the name of Arctic Medical Research. Since 1996, the Journal has been published by the University of Oulu (Finland), the International Union of Circumpolar Health, and the Nordic Society for Arctic Medicine. In 2004, the University of Manitoba and the University of Alaska joined the team of publishers.

CANHR staff member Brian Saylor represents the University of Alaska on the Publishers Board. His role is to approve the editorial team, hire the Journal's Editor-in-Chief, and set the annual journal operating budget.

Through sponsorship in the IJCH, Alaska now has increased access to a new vehicle for disseminating the results of important research to other circumpolar people. The Journal has already published the 2004 supplement on the Social Transitions in the North, a study of changes in Alaskan and Siberian communities. Alaska can take additional advantage of this dissemination opportunity by submitting articles for peer review to the Board of Editors of the IJCH. ▲

## Participatory Research... *(Cont. from p. 1)*

It wasn't until November that the research team arrived at a workable template that is now used to fit in the details for each of the villages. Even now, small changes are still making their way into the presentation after it has been presented to the village. Dr. Legaspi stated, "We see this as part of a continuing process of collaboration between those who have a stake in this research, which ultimately benefits the villages, CANHR, and UAF."

The phase of disseminating research results back to the communities requires translation from English into Cup'ik and Yup'ik. Several Alaska Natives, including Eliza Orr, Wiz Ruppert, Anna Angaiak,

Anna Jacobson, and Louise Shavings have been working on this task.

Eliza Orr, a Yup'ik Eskimo from Tununak, has been involved in translating and disseminating a wide variety of information into Yup'ik, including translating consent forms and questionnaires and transcribing the responses back into English. Ms. Orr is involved in disseminating data into Yup'ik and travels to villages to present the information back to the communities. She is also currently working with Cécile Lardon translating a community readiness questionnaire for the Cultural Understandings of Health project. Yup'ik is Ms. Orr's first language, though she says it can be challenging to find equivalent words between English and Yup'ik, especially scientific terms. For example, there is not word for "genes" in Yup'ik. "I have to do a lot of explaining." Ms. Orr says even though she has been translating for years, she continues to expand her vocabulary. "During most of the translations I learn new words." ▲

### PHOTO BELOW

*Field Research Assistants in training (left to right): Fancy Lomack, Charles Moses, Scarlett Hutchison (Field Research Coordinator), Anna Angaiak with Adam Ruppert, Margaret Pavila, and Filma Peter.*







## Data Under Review from the Infant Morbidity and Mortality Cohort Study

CANHR is currently in the process of assessing the quality of data from the 1960-1962 Infant Morbidity and Mortality Cohort (IMMC). The Center's goal is to determine the ways the data might be used in addressing threats to the health and welfare of the Yukon-Kuskokwim (Y-K) Delta populations.

In 1960, using the Children of Kauai (COK) study as a model, Dr. Jim Maynard established a clinic based research model in Alaska through the Alaska Health Research Center to assess the health of children on the Y-K Delta. The goal of the study was to follow all documented births over a two year time period.

The cohort program followed 643 children born in 27 communities on the Y-K Delta over a 24-month period between 1960 and 1962. These children were assessed for overall health and development.

The last full review of the Alaska cohort took place in 1975 when the members were teenagers. Dr. Thomas Bender, leader of the third round, felt this would be the last time the cohort could be easily located for such a follow-up investigation because the cohort members would likely be difficult to locate as adults.

In 1996, the IMMC collection was archived when the Alaska Area Office of the Indian Health Service was phased down and the

tribal bodies compacted for services. The entity with authority over the IMMC collection is now the YKHC. CANHR has secured permission from the YKHC to conduct a preliminary review of the IMMC materials to see if the information can contribute to continued improvement of health and the delivery of services in the region.

CANHR will assess the quality of the data and the number of individuals in the original cohort who are still alive. Once this is completed, the Center will offer suggestions on how YKHC can use the data to address threats to the health and welfare of its populations. ▲

## CANHR Funds Research on Nutrients and Contaminants

CANHR funded a pilot research project by UAF researcher Dr. Todd O'Hara to study nutrients and contaminants in subsistence use mammals in northwestern Alaska. Dr. O'Hara's goals are to document the effects of food processing on the nutritive values and

select contaminant levels in tissues of subsistence use mammals, and to determine the nutrient concentrations in the tissues used for general human health that likely offset diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease.



*Rhonda Swor and Dr. Todd O'Hara sampling a spotted seal.*

# CANHR Director Receives National Rural Mental Health Award

Middle school math teacher, founding college president, university dean and professor, psychologist, and researcher are but a few of the contributions to rural mental health in Alaska Native and American Indian communities that earned Gerald (Jerry) Mohatt the Victor I. Howery Memorial Award from the National Association of Rural Mental Health.

Mohatt, professor of psychology and director of the Institute of Arctic Biology Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR) at the University of Alaska Fairbanks was honored by the NARMH for his "significant contributions to the field of rural mental health" with the 2003 Howery Award at the group's annual conference in Boulder, Colorado June 24, 2004.

Former First Lady Roslyn Carter was NARMH's first Howery Award recipient.

Two summers teaching middle-school math and social science at a Jesuit school on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation in South Dakota began Mohatt's lifelong commitment to providing mental health services to

indigenous people.

"Jerry is above all things wise," said Karen Perdue, University of Alaska associate vice president for health. "He is wise about Alaska, its people, how to do research with communities, and how to bring out the best in people around him. When he speaks, people from village elders to university presidents listen with respect."

"Jerry is truly a visionary in the field of rural mental health. He has been instrumental in the development of innovative higher education programs that equip practitioners who provide services throughout rural Alaska," said Catherine Koverola, chair of the UAF department of psychology.

Mohatt established a UAF master's degree program in psychology that addresses cross-cultural issues and is working with faculty at UAF and UAA to develop a Ph.D. program in psychology that has an indigenous focus, the only such program in the U.S.

He received a National Institutes for Health RO1 research grant for his project "People

Awakening Project " that studies Alaska Native pathways to sobriety and has worked with FNA and TCC to develop and evaluate a children's mental health system that is Athabascan-specific because, he said, "we found children weren't identified or served (for mental health issues) until they were often part of the juvenile justice system."

"Jerry has intrinsic integrity and the people he works with know this. It's a quality you know the moment you meet him," said David Lambert, NARMH president. "His emphasis is on building relationships and really understanding people and their values. He focuses on the importance of social context not simply clinical solutions when treating mental health issues."

NARMH was founded in 1977 to develop and enhance rural mental health and substance abuse services and to support mental health providers in rural areas. ▲

*Reprinted with permission from Marie Gilbert, Institute of Arctic Biology*

## ***What is the Victor I. Howery Memorial Award?***

This award is given for significant contributions to the field of rural mental health. The National Association for Rural Mental Health defines "contributions" as such concrete things as articles, research, model program development, educational/training programs, etc. and/or significant leadership in the field. This is NARMH's oldest award and was established by the Howery family to honor the memory of perhaps the most significant of the founding fathers of NARMH, Victor I. Howery. Victor I. Howery spent most of his career at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, in extension service, working on issues of rural mental health.

*Provided by the National Association for Rural Mental Health*



Gerald Mohatt





## Dr. Aggie Legaspi Joins the Dissemination Phase

Augusto (Aggie) Legaspi joined the CANHR staff in the summer of 2003. He completed his Ph.D. at Michigan State University in Ecological-Community Psychology in 2000. Between 2000-2002 he taught at the University of the Philippines at Quezon City.

Ecological Community Psychology focuses on the interactions between the individual and the social and physical environments. At the University of the Philippines, one of Dr. Legaspi's interests was the extent to which indigenous concepts and ideas were incorporated into the psychology courses taught at the University of the Philippines. It is a concern that most of the psychology taught at the University is based on western concepts.

Dr. Legaspi's interest in Ecological Community Psychology and Indigenous Psychology drew him to the University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2002, where the Psychology Department has a mission of providing training that reflects both community and indigenous perspectives. Dr. Legaspi initially worked with CANHR Executive Director Gerald Mohatt with the People Awakening Project. His task was to collaborate with a team to translate measurements into Yup'ik. Through this experience, he became more acquainted with the Cultural-Behavioral Core of CANHR.

Dr. Legaspi's role in CANHR is in the dissemination phase of the CANHR projects. He has worked closely with Yup'ik and Cup'ik members of the CANHR team to help develop templates for data presentations. For more information, see the article on Participatory Research in this newsletter. ▲



Aggie Legaspi

## Staff Highlights

### Dr. Elaine M. Drew, New CANHR Investigator

Elaine Drew joined CANHR in August 2004 after completing her Ph.D. in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. She now holds a joint faculty appointment at the University of Alaska Fairbanks in the Institute of Arctic Biology and the Department of Psychology.

As a medical anthropologist, Dr. Drew's research orientation draws from anthropological holism and the ecological model of health behavior to emphasize how individual, social, and contextual factors shape health and illness in different cultural settings. "My primary interest is in how individual beliefs and experiences, along with social and structural factors, influence health decision making, behavioral strategies, and ultimately, health outcomes," she said. "To ignore any one of these components is to dismiss a central mechanism of everyday life for people suffering with sickness and disease."

As a new investigator for CANHR, Dr. Drew's current activities include becoming acclimated to research in remote Alaska Native villages, collaborating with current investigators on ongoing projects, contributing to the dissemination and publication of preliminary findings, and the development of new research proposals. ▲



Elaine M. Drew



## Louise Shavings Translates Research Findings into Cup'ik

Louise Shavings, a Cup'ik Eskimo from Mekoryuk, joined the CANHR staff last fall. She works with the Knowledge Application and Dissemination Core translating research results into Cup'ik so results can be brought back to native speaking individuals in their communities.

Ms. Shavings graduated from the Covenant High School in Unalakleet, and later earned an Associates Degree in Human Services (1996) and a Bachelors degree in Social Work (1998) from UAA. She is now pursuing a Masters degree in Social Work and expects to graduate in 2006. Ms. Shavings currently works with the National Resource Center for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiian Elders transcribing and translating Alaska Native elder interviews regarding service delivery values and expectations.

Although Ms. Shaving describes English as her first language, she spent the first 14 years of her life listening to her parents converse in Cup'ik. She finds it easier to understand Cup'ik than to speak it, though she is becoming more fluent. One challenge Ms. Shavings has encountered is that not all scientific concepts are easily translated into Cup'ik. Another challenge has been strengthening her vocal cords in order to make the guttural Cup'ik sounds. "I spoke with difficulty and when I did my throat would tire and become sore due to lack of usage."

Through translation, Ms. Shavings believes she can more effectively share the results from the CANHR research and NRC project with affected Cup'ik communities. "I am able to re learn my language and be able to bring it back to my own people. It means more for them to hear it in their own languages." ▲



Louise Shavings

## Dr. Tracey Burke Works with STN Data

Tracey Burke, an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at UAA, joined the CANHR team to analyze existing data sets, including the Social Transitions in the North (STN) data. "My task is to figure out if there is anything in STN that would inform the current CANHR work."

Dr. Burke grew up in the suburbs outside of Philadelphia. After earning a Bachelors degree in philosophy from Villanova University, she moved to Bethel with the Jesuit Volunteer Corp and worked with pregnant and parenting teens, often traveling between the villages. "The highlight of the year was coaching 8-9 young women through their deliveries. They didn't often have family or the father there."

Later, Dr. Burke earned an MSW at the University of Minnesota and a Ph.D. in Social Welfare at the University of Washington, returning to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta to complete her dissertation in 2003.

During her time with CANHR, Dr. Burke has been sifting through data gathered from the Social Transitions in the North project, which looked at resilience related to changes in the social structures of people in rural southwest Alaska and the Russian Far East. "It's been great getting a sense of what is in that data set... There are these things sitting there--could they be useful?"

What Dr. Burke has found especially rewarding during her time with CANHR is getting to know the other CANHR folks working in the Y-K Delta. She appreciates their consciousness to cultural differences and how these differences play into what they research. "It's been a great opportunity to get to know people who are really invested in this. That reinforces the things I value anyway." ▲



Tracey Burke



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