Building on tradition. That was the theme of the State of the University address given by UAB President Carol Garrison.

“As we build for the future, we’re building on a tradition at this university,” she told faculty, staff and students Sept. 14.

She highlighted all of the building projects that are under way or nearing completion on campus, such as the new University Hospital, the campus recreation center, the renovated ground floor of the optometry building, the seventh floor renovation of the dentistry building, renovation of the Hulsey Center and the new Shelby Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Building.

Garrison said the new buildings will offer improved research and learning space for faculty and students, as well as attract top-notch faculty and students to the university.

Attracting the best, brightest

In addition to improving infrastructure, Garrison said the university continues to play host to the best and the brightest.

Future built on tradition of success

BY STEPHANIE HASBROUCK
Reporter Staff

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Fresh food cost may be linked to obesity

BY STEPHANIE HASBROUCK
Reporter Staff

For years, parents have been associated with the common phrase “eat your vegetables” — but times have changed. Children are consuming fewer fruits and vegetables and are becoming overweight. The problem may not be their unwillingness to eat healthy foods, however. A new study here is examining the factors that may keep parents from purchasing and preparing fruits and vegetables — such as cost, time constraints and lack of accessibility.

UAB has received a $25,000 grant from an anonymous individual donor to study the impact of fruit and vegetable cost on obesity in children. UAB was selected as one of five institutions to receive the one-year pilot funding. Researchers are looking at the monetary costs of fruits and vegetables and also the perceived costs associated with buying and preparing them.

As the American Heart Association reports that among American children ages 6-11 in 2000, 11.9 percent of white children were overweight, the study seeks to examine the factors that influence fruit and vegetable purchases.

“Depending on the outcome of that [pilot project], there may be potential for funding for larger-scale work,” said Assistant Professor Monica Baskin (Health Behavior), principal investigator.

Childhood obesity is becoming a common concern among parents and health-care providers. The American Heart Association reports that among American children ages 6-11 in 2000, 11.9 percent of white children were overweight.
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“Dr. Rich brings a history of taking strong research enterprises and enabling them to become elite programs,” UAB President Carol Garrison said.

“He is a noted researcher, having been a Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator, an outstanding clinician and an accomplished instructor. “The search committee, headed by Drs. Max Cooper and James McClintock, has been tireless in its efforts to bring to UAB the person best able to guide our medical efforts for the future.”

Rich joined Emory in 1998. He was responsible for clinical and basic science research programs at the medical school and guided the unfolding of the school’s new strategic plan for research. In that time, the medical school’s research funding from the National Institutes of Health increased dramatically. For fiscal year 2003, Emory received more than $158 million from NIH, nearly double its amount when Rich arrived. UAB received more than $208 million.

Rich is new VP, dean of medicine

Dr. Robert R. Rich, executive associate dean for research and strategic initiatives at Emory University School of Medicine, is the new UAB vice president and dean of the School of Medicine. Rich’s appointment is effective Oct. 1.

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Fresh food cost may be linked to obesity

Study also examines accessibility, prep-time as contributors

BY STEPHANIE HASBROUCK
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Burden of caregivers not eased by institutional care

New challenges raise anxiety for relatives of dementia patients

BY BOB SHEPARD

Caregivers who place their relatives into a long-term care facility get no relief from depression and anxiety, in fact, they suffer added emotional trauma as a result, according to results of a multi-site study published in the recent Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

UAB was one of the sites in this first study to provide a comprehensive analysis of the emotional turmoil caregivers experience during the transition of their loved one from home to a long-term care facility, including the conditions that led to placement, the nature of contact between them and their relatives after institutionalization and the impact of these factors on health outcomes among caregivers following the placement.

Results from the four-year study of 1,222 caregiver-patient pairs found that for the 180 caregivers who had to turn over care of their loved one to an institutional setting, symptoms of depression and anxiety stayed as high as they were when they were in-home caregivers. These findings stand in sharp contrast to earlier findings reported by some of the same authors showing that death of a loved one after care-giving results in improvement in depression.

“Unlike the sense of closure and relief reported by caregivers after the death of a loved one with dementia, caregivers who have placed their loved ones in an institution continue to experience distress and depression,” said Associate Professor Alan Stevens (Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine).

Stevens said caregivers often feel distressed over the suffering and decline of their loved ones, while facing new challenges such as frequent trips to the long-term care facility, reduced control over the care provided their relative and assumed responsibilities for coordinating and monitoring that care.

In addition, cognitive and functional declines are common in patients who go into long-term care, and caregivers often blame themselves for this decline and question their decision to institutionalize their loved one, said Dr. Richard Schulz, director of the Center for Social and Urban Research at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine and lead author on the paper. The University of Pittsburgh was the coordinating site for the study.

Caregivers who were married to the patient and those who visited most frequently had the most difficult transition. Spouses reported higher levels of depression both before and after placement and more anxiety after placement than their non-spouse counterparts. Almost half of the caregivers in the study visited the patient daily and continued to provide some form of physical care during their visits.

“This study shows that we need to help caregivers who place their relatives. We need to treat their emotional distress, educate them about the nature of long-term care facilities and their impact on patient functioning, engage them in end-of-life planning and prepare them for the eventual death of their loved one,” Schulz said.

The patients in this study all were diagnosed with moderate to severe Alzheimer’s disease and had a median age of 80 years. Caregivers were mostly female with a median age of 63. The sample was 56 percent white, 24.2 percent African-American and 19 percent Hispanic, and caregivers primarily were spouses or children.

Researchers found that African-American and Hispanic caregivers were less likely to place their relative in a facility than whites; caregivers reporting greater burden were more likely to place their loved one in long-term care, and caregivers who reported that their caregiving experience made them feel important were less likely to place their relative in a facility.

The study was funded by the National Institute on Aging and the National Institute for Nursing Research.

Barriers to better diet examined

Continued from page 1

boys and 12 percent of white girls were overweight. More than 17 percent of African-American boys and 22 percent of African-American girls were overweight.

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry reports that between 16 and 33 percent of all children and adolescents in the United States are obese.

Though it is an easy medical condition to recognize, it is difficult to treat. If not treated, overweight children likely will become overweight adults.

“The donor wanted to target African-American and low-income populations [for the study]. Those populations have a higher prevalence of overweight and obese individuals,” Baskin said.

She said the goal of the project is to develop a model of cost and how it affects fruit and vegetable consumption in children.

“We’re thinking about what goes into people’s decisions to purchase and consume fruits and vegetables,” she said. “One [factor] is actual cost, and the other is perceived cost.”

The project will determine what the perceived costs are, Baskin said.

“We’re hypothesizing that it’s the total cost that makes a difference,” she said, which includes not only the monetary cost of the items, but the total energy and time it takes to prepare fruits and vegetables for children.

The project will utilize data from a recent study conducted by Professor Frank Franklin (Pediatrics). That study involved 1,500 families and examined fruit and vegetable consumption among students in Birmingham City middle schools. “Also from that data set, we will collect information on food availability — what was available at home and at school,” she said.

In addition, Baskin said she and her colleagues will collect new data from a focus group of 100 children and 100 parents who are demographically similar to those who participated in Franklin’s study.

“That [group] will help us identify what the perceived costs are and what the additional barriers are,” she said.

Baskin said she will consult the Consumer Price Index to determine the actual cost of the top 20 fruits and vegetables that are identified from both groups.

“In the end, we’ll have a model: total cost equals actual cost plus perceived cost,” she said.

Baskin said she hopes the results of the study can be used to inform public policy if in fact actual cost is the main influence in fruit and vegetable consumption.

If the project determines that perceived costs are the driving factor, Baskin said those perceived costs can be targeted in future interventions.

“If there are time barriers, we can produce time-saving tips. If the parents need recipes, we can provide those,” she said.

LETTERS

The UAB Reporter will publish opinions in its pages as letters to the editor or commentary. Submissions that include a name and daytime telephone number will be accepted by mail at AB 1320-0113, by fax (4-7911) or e-mail to lfg@uab.edu.

Letters may be edited for brevity, clarity and good taste.

UAB lecture series examines human genome project

The UAB First Thursday Lecture Series will present a discussion by Director Eric J. Sorscher titled Diagnostic and Therapeutic Implications of the Human Genome Project 7 p.m. Oct. 7 in the Spencer Honors House. The event is free and open to the public.

Sorscher directs the Gregory Fleming James Cystic Fibrosis Research Center at UAB. Researchers at the center are investigating new therapeutic approaches in human genetics and genetic diseases.

Call the UAB Honors House, 934-3228, for details.