Work-Related Health Risks

Occupational Epidemiologists Analyze the Data

Who do you call when unusual numbers of workers develop potentially life-threatening health problems?

If you’re a multinational oil company, a national automobile manufacturing company, and more recently a large semiconductor manufacturer—you contact UAB’s Occupational Epidemiology group. Headed by Elizabeth Delzell, this UAB team has been evaluating health risks in the workplace since 1984.

First Study of Its Kind

“The semiconductor manufacturing study is the first of its kind,” Delzell notes. “It’s a large study that explores general mortality and cancer-incidence patterns in the semiconductor manufacturing industry. In that regard, it’s an important new piece of research.”

The investigation involves three different facilities in California, New York, and Vermont. Two manufacture semiconductors, and the other makes information-storage devices such as computer hard drives. Delzell says the process of manufacturing the storage devices is similar to the semiconductor manufacturing process.

“Our research efforts will be enhanced at the company’s California and New York facilities because those states have well-established population-based cancer registries,” Delzell says. “Vermont’s tumor registry is fairly recent, so it would be difficult to evaluate cancer incidence there. Having access to cancer registries is important when you want to evaluate cancers that tend to be associated with good survival, such as breast cancer and prostate cancer.”

The semiconductor manufacturing study will describe mortality patterns in more than 100,000 people who have been employed in the industry since the mid-1960s. Therefore, the UAB team expects to provide a large amount of information about patterns of mortality from a wide variety of diseases in the computer industry.

Cause and Effect

Occupational epidemiology helps companies establish the cause or causes—if any—of work-related health risks and provides a (continued on page 2)
means of comparing the health of workers to the general population. Workers benefit because occupational studies may result in reduction of exposure to health risks and in reassurance about exposures that prove to be innocuous in the occupational setting.

“The semiconductor manufacturing company will use information gleaned from our study to let employees know how their mortality patterns compare to mortality patterns in the general population,” Delzell says. “In particular, the company is interested in learning if there are occupational hazards that increase the risk for certain diseases. The study will provide some preliminary information on whether or not occupational factors play a role in employee mortality and cancer-incidence patterns. If preliminary results warrant further investigation, then it will be possible to design more research to get the needed information.”

Delzell believes that the rest of the semiconductor industry will conduct this type of research in the future. “Our current study will fit in nicely with a research program that soon may be industry-wide.”

In addition to Delzell, UAB investigators involved in the semiconductor manufacturing project are Nalini Sathiakumar, Fabio Barbone, and Colleen Beall. The UAB team is collaborating with investigators Robert Herrick and James Stewart from Harvard University to evaluate employee work histories.

The semiconductor manufacturing study also has an advisory panel, whose members include researchers from Harvard, the University of Washington, and the University of North Carolina.

**Unraveling a Deadly Mystery**

In 1996, oil company officials awarded Delzell and researchers at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, contracts to study disease patterns in a group of 7,000 employees. The employees, who worked at the company’s midwestern research center, had an unusually high occurrence of intracranial tumors, including benign and malignant tumors. Delzell says that although the number of cases was not large, there were enough cases to cause concern.

“Both the company and employees have been following the situation carefully,” Delzell says. “A few years back, we launched a full-scale epidemiological investigation, and our group began a series of five studies, including researching mortality patterns and cancer-incidence patterns. In one group of employees, we conducted an indepth survey of more than 2,100 people, looking for all different types of tumors, both benign and malignant. Our findings showed a consistently high rate of brain cancer among chemical researchers, but overall, workers at the facility enjoy better health than the general population.”
Of the nearly 7,000 employees who had worked at the oil company’s research center, 19 developed some type of intracranial tumor. “The types of tumors were quite diverse,” Delzell says. “Seven employees were found to have gliomas, which is a form of brain cancer. What was unusual is that all of the people with glioma had worked in the same building complex during roughly the same period of time.”

The oil company study confirmed that there was an unusually high incidence of brain cancer among workers, which may have been due to occupational exposure. There also were excesses of some other types of diseases among employees, but researchers were uncertain about the role the workplace played in their onset.

Building Cars Safely

For the past 10 years, Delzell and her colleagues have been conducting studies for an American automobile manufacturer and an auto-worker’s union. One ongoing study focuses on the union’s hourly employees at the company, and the other involves salaried employees who work in supervisory positions in the production assembly line. Both groups are exposed to many of the same conditions and are being studied rather intensely. Delzell and UAB epidemiologist David Brown plan to complete the auto-industry study this year.

Following another automotive industry investigation to evaluate the connection between employment in motor vehicle manufacturing (MVM) and prostate cancer deaths in MVM workers, Brown and Delzell published a paper in the July 2000 issue of the American Journal of Industrial Medicine. They concluded that the relationships between MVM and prostate cancer “were weak and may have been due to chance. Core and mold making and metal melting and pouring foundry operations entail potential exposure to metal dusts and fumes, to polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, and to other chemicals. However, associations between these exposures and prostate cancer have not been reported consistently, nor have other studies of foundry workers consistently noted an excess of prostate cancer.”

Methods used in the MVM study included investigation of 322 prostate cancer deaths occurring from 1973 through 1987. A control group of 1,285 people was selected from among 126,100 male MVM workers.

Weeding Out Herbicide Effects

Delzell is involved in other ongoing studies, including a long-term investigation into mortality patterns and cancer-incidence rates among herbicide manufacturing workers. Contributors to the study include UAB epidemiologist Nalini Sathiakumar and epidemiology doctoral student Paul A. MacLennan.

In addition, Delzell is collaborating with Sathiakumar, UAB epidemiologist Maurizio Macaluso, and epidemiology doctoral student John Graff to update a study of synthetic rubber industry workers who were exposed to butadiene, a chemical made from the processing of petroleum. Butadiene is used to make synthetic rubber for cars, trucks, and for making plastics. It’s a probable human carcinogen and a suspected cause of leukemia.

The synthetic rubber workers study involves more than 17,000 subjects, making it the largest-ever occupational epidemiology investigation of the potential side effects of exposure to butadiene. Results of the UAB study have been used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its Canadian and European counterparts to develop regulations setting limits for exposure to butadiene in the workplace. Delzell and her colleagues plan to issue a report on their updated study of synthetic rubber workers next year.

Occupational epidemiologists play a vital role in health research and in developing regulations for exposure to occupational hazards. That’s what draws Delzell to the profession. “I enjoy contributing to the common good,” she says. “If our work helps determine that a specific agent causes a particular disease, then everyone benefits. I also enjoy training the next generation of occupational epidemiologists.”

UAB’s occupational epidemiology team includes (pictured from top left) Colleen Beall, David Brown, Paul MacLennan, Fabio Barbone, John Graff, Erika Brown, Robert Matthews, Theresa Burton, Rosa Arnold, Mark Leader, Editha Edwards, Susan Myers, Tracey Dunn, Sherry Wells, Nalini Sathiakumar, and team leader Elizabeth Delzell.
Aging is inevitable. If we live long enough—and Americans are living longer and longer—we reach a point when time is no longer on our side and we become susceptible to age-related health problems such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s disease, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, and diabetes.

Yet, surprisingly, the dilemma of how to pay for the long-term care of an increasingly elderly population is an issue that gets relatively little attention, says UAB health care policy expert David C. Grabowski. Vastly complicating the issue is the fact that today’s aging population includes the roughly 77-million baby boomers who were born in the years from 1946 to 1964, after World War II. As an indication of the enormity of their numbers, it’s reported that every eight seconds a baby boomer turns 50.

Mixed Blessing

We may be living longer but we also may be enjoying life less. “Medical science is helping us live and remain healthy longer than our ancestors, but our very longevity creates unavoidable health consequences,” says UAB environmental health scientist Rui-Ming Liu, who studies “oxidative stress” and other aging mechanisms triggered by the environment.

“Environmental agents that cause oxidative damage to our bodies are all around us, even in the air we breathe,” Liu says. “Substances such as ozone and nitrogen dioxide release oxygen free radicals that damage cells.”

As we age, according to Liu, our built-in cellular defense system against oxidants deteriorates, increasing our chances of contracting debilitating diseases such as infections, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. “Our research objective,” Liu says, “is to cultivate different ways of combating oxidative stress by developing chemical compounds that will reinforce existing antioxidant defenses within the body.”

Looming Long-Term Care

Inevitably, a large proportion of baby boomers will need long-term care (LTC), says Grabowski, who is also an associate scholar at the Lister Hill Center for Health Policy and a scientist in the UAB Center for Aging (CFA). At the CFA Grabowski studies aging-related health issues such as Medicaid reimbursement, the quality of nursing home care, and why people don’t purchase private long-term care insurance.

“We need to be preparing for the long-term care of a burgeoning elderly population now,” Grabowski says. “Within a decade, the U.S. economy, and especially its entitlement programs, will be, as former Congressional Budget Office Director Robert Reischauer put it, ‘engulfed by the demographic tsunami of the baby-boom generation.’”

LTC utilization and costs will soar, says Grabowski. He points to a major Brookings study on LTC that predicts the nation’s over-65 population will grow to 40 million people by 2018. In 1993, the over-65 population totaled 33 million people. Total U.S. expenditures for the elderly population’s combined use of nursing home and home health care are expected to soar from $75 billion to $166 billion by 2018.

Who Will Pay?

At present, Medicare and Medicaid pay about 31 percent and 25 percent, respectively, of all home health and nursing home care for persons 65 year old and older. Other government sources cover 4 percent of these costs, and the elderly and their families bear 39 percent of the costs. Private long-term care insurance covers less than 5 percent of LTC costs.

Put another way, from 95 to 99 percent of all LTC costs are covered by taxpayer-supported programs that pick up about 60 percent of the tab, while individuals pay most of the rest.
Nursing home costs average about $40,000 a year. Without third-party support, those costs can be financially devastating for many seniors.

“If the current mix of public and private arrangements for covering LTC remains unchanged,” Grabowski says, “a substantial portion of today’s baby boomers will eventually wrestle with the cruel options already confronting many of today’s elderly: near-depletion of personal assets, a burdensome reliance on kinfolks, welfare dependency—sometimes achieved surreptitiously by transferring assets to offspring—or some combination of those unpalatable alternatives.”

For most retirees, the bill for a full-year in a nursing home now averages about $40,000 a year. “Without third-party support, that cost is financially devastating to most seniors,” says Grabowski.

Recent analyzes indicate that 14 to 18 percent of the elderly whose nursing home care is currently paid for by Medicaid were not Medicaid-eligible when first admitted to the nursing home. To achieve the required level of medical indigence mandated by law, they had to “spend down” personal assets to the point of near illiquidity.

Unless strategies change, many baby boomers potentially face a grim future in their so-called golden years. Boomers can’t rely on savings only to pay for future care essentials. They need to prepare for long-term care by purchasing LTC insurance now, rather than later. “If individuals wait until retirement to buy LTC insurance, the rates become prohibitive,” he points out.

In 1996, the average annual premium cost for a policy that would provide four years of inflation-protected LTC coverage for a 65-year-old person was about $1,829, says Grabowski. For a policy with the same features purchased at age 79, the average premium in 1996 was $5,592. However, the cost of the average yearly premium for the same policy sold to someone 50-years-old was only $802 annually. Naturally, those costs have increased in the past four years.

“Obviously, in buying LTC insurance, timing of purchase is a critical factor in determining the year-to-year affordability of coverage for many people,” Grabowski says. “The earlier individuals join the LTC insurance pool, the greater the effective cross subsidy between their younger, low-risk years and their older, high-risk years.”

**TLC Versus LTC**

“Individuals prefer to get their care from family members, and historically that has been the way we have cared for our elderly parents in this country,” notes Grabowski. “In the past, it was primarily daughters who took care of their elderly mothers or fathers. That’s changed with the increased participation of women in the labor force and with geographic dispersion of families. We now see less and less care by family members and more and more formal care.

“Still, many elderly people prefer to be cared for by their families,” Grabowski says. “They sometimes reason, ‘If I purchase long-term care insurance, it becomes easier for my family to put me in a nursing home, but I would prefer for them to care for me in their homes.’”

Baby boomers haven’t yet come to grips with the fact that their children may not be able to care for them, Grabowski says. But he thinks that will change as the media continues to focus on the issue: “Boomers are just beginning to glimpse the need to provide for their own long-term care.”

So if you decide LTC insurance is a prudent investment, how do you buy it? There are two primary ways—under a group plan or as an individual. Group coverage offered through an employer usually is less expensive than purchasing an individual policy.

**Saving Nickels, Saving Dimes**

Working with a colleague, Joseph Lipscomb of the National Cancer Institute, Grabowski cost-analyzed the amount of money a 45-year-old individual needs to save in order to actually afford LTC insurance at age 65.

“We were really blown away by the numbers,” Grabowski says. “We set up a simulation model with reasonable assumptions about inflation rates, tax treatment of savings, rates-of-return, and other important factors to analyze what an individual at age 45 would have to save to finance long-term care until the standard retirement age of 65—a period of 20 years. We were astonished to discover that by age 65 an individual would need to save between $23,934 and $64,929 depending on the assumptions underlying the model.”

They then estimated the costs to secure lifetime LTC coverage if an individual began purchasing long-term care insurance at age 45. “We found that a 45-year-old would have to pay close to $1,000 every year until retirement for LTC insurance,” says Grabowski.

That out-of-pocket LTC insurance burden is dramatically affected by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), Grabowski points out. LTC insurance plans that meet certain coverage requirements are now “accorded virtually the same tax-advantaged status as acute-care insurance,” he says.

“LTC insurance is expensive,” Grabowski says, “but it may be a good investment—in addition to the tax advantage—if you have wealth and assets to protect. Buying LTC insurance in middle age provides an added bonus—immediate coverage in the case of a tragic accident or unanticipated debilitating disease. Long-term care needs can strike at any age.”
Kids SCHIP Comes In

Health Care for all Alabama Children

Two years ago Alabama staked its CHIPs on a health insurance program that encompasses “all kids.”

The number of Americans without health insurance in 1998 numbered 44.3 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Alabama, recognizing the problem, took action that year to provide health insurance for its uninsured children. In doing so, Alabama became the first state in the nation to create, under the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) of Title XXI of the Social Security Act, a program known as the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). SCHIP provides comprehensive Medicaid health insurance to children, up to age 19, whose families’ incomes are at or below the poverty line. Last year, the state instituted phase II—a program called All Kids, which provides insurance coverage through the private sector for children who live in households with incomes just above the poverty line.

The Program Works

Currently, UAB maternal and child health experts Beverly Mulvihill and Joseph Telfair are working with the Alabama Department of Public Health to assess the effectiveness of this historic initiative, since federal legislation requires that the program be evaluated.

Between November 1999 and January 2000, the Mulvihill-Telfair team mailed a survey to 6,200 households of the 25,748 children enrolled in the All Kids program. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine whether participating children now had better, easier access to health care.

“We got a 58-percent return rate,” says Mulvihill, principal investigator on the project. “Preliminary analysis reveals that the All Kids program is working as designed. More Alabama children are covered by health insurance now than previously, and access to health care has improved for all children participating in these programs. In addition, more children now have a regular health care provider, fewer children are going without needed medical care, and children are receiving medical care in a more timely manner.”

That’s good news for Alabama. Lack of medical insurance doesn’t just reflect adverse economic conditions, it also contributes to health problems. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, studies show that, compared to insured people, the uninsured are more likely to report poor health status, less likely to visit doctors’ offices, and more likely to be hospitalized for conditions that could have been prevented with timely outpatient care.

In Alabama, the SCHIP and All Kids programs are providing on-the-spot insurance coverage for well children preventive care visits, sick child doctor visits, prescription drugs, dental services, hospital admissions, and limited mental health substance abuse services. In addition, no child is denied eligibility based on preexisting medical conditions.

Heartwarming Response

“Health insurance is one of the most important variables determining whether or not children get access to care,” Mulvihill says. “From our preliminary results, it appears the programs are working.” Many of the respondents to the survey indicated they were pleased with All Kids.

“At the end of our questionnaire,” continues Mulvihill, “we asked respondents, ‘Is there anything else you want to tell us?’ About 65 percent of those responding provided additional comments, many of which expressed praise and thanks for the program. Remarks such as, ‘I’m so grateful for this program. I was able to get care for my child that I couldn’t get before’ were common. The responses were heartwarming, positive, and appreciative.”

Mulvihill and Telfair are now creating a second survey to poll new enrollees and to determine why some families have dropped out of the program.

Alabama parents who want to find out if their children qualify for SCHIP or All Kids should call 1-888-373-5437.
AIDS Spreads around the World

UAB Provides Preventive Training

Against this dramatic backdrop of the escalating worldwide battle to combat HIV/AIDS, UAB’s School of Public Health experts are working with developing countries to strengthen public health, biomedical, and behavioral training programs that further HIV/AIDS research and prevention.

UAB HIV/AIDS training initiatives, financed through a $630,000 NIH grant to UAB’s AIDS International Training and Research Program (AITRP), target scientists, clinicians, and allied health workers from Bangladesh, China, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Rwanda, and Zambia, says Sibylle Kristensen, AITRP manager.

Specific AITRP aims include providing critical public health, biomedical, and behavioral science research expertise to health professionals and researchers from the eight target nations; promoting new prevention research that complements and facilitates existing international research endeavors; establishing long-term collaborative relationships among investigators at UAB and HIV/STD researchers in other countries; and fostering collaborations between U.S. academic research centers and regional alliances of foreign scientists in the eight target nations.

“Our training and research program includes both long- and short-term training,” says epidemiologist Sten H. Vermund, lead investigator on the grant and director of UAB’s John J. Sparkman Center for Public Health Education. “Long-term trainees are usually enrolled in one of our school’s master’s degree programs.”

Short-term training provides instruction in planning implementation, and conduct of clinical and population-based studies. HIV vaccine and other prevention trials and investigations involving STD control methods, perinatal prevention, research ethics, and methodology of product evaluation are emphasized. Training also includes laboratory testing with an emphasis on screening, diagnosis, quality control, and safety.

One trainee, Baofa Jiang, an associate professor at China’s Shandong Medical University (SMU), recently returned to China after participating in an eight-month, specially tailored training program developed under the guidance of UAB epidemiologist Maurizio Macaluso. Jiang received intensive instruction in STD/HIV research methods, including study design, data collection, management, and analysis.

While at UAB, Jiang designed a pilot study of female condom use among Chinese women in Shandong Province. Implementation of the population-based study was partly funded by AITRP. Objectives of the study include evaluating the efficacy of female and male condoms in preventing disease among Chinese women and clarifying the role of both types of condom in contraception and STD prevention.

In September, Macaluso and Jiang will travel to China to conduct a two-week training program on STD/HIV risk behavior assessment and research methods.

The Clinton administration recently took the unusual and historic step of designating AIDS as a threat to U.S. national security and requested $325 million—double its original request—to fight AIDS abroad.

“Convinced that the global spread of AIDS is reaching catastrophic dimensions, the Clinton administration has formally designated the disease for the first time as a threat to U.S. national security that could topple foreign governments, touch off ethnic wars, and undo decades of work in building free-market democracies,” states a recent Washington Post report.

AIDS is now the leading killer in sub-Saharan Africa, where 24.5 million people have HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. With only one-tenth of the world’s population, the region has two-thirds of the world’s HIV-positive cases, according to the United Nations. In some countries, as many as one in every four people are thought to carry HIV. Many of these people are below the age of 25.
Dillon Named AIHA Fellow

Environmental health sciences specialist Kenneth Dillon has been named a fellow of the American Industrial Hygiene Association (AIHA). The Fellow Award is given to individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of industrial hygiene.

In presenting Dillon with the award, AIHA President James Thornton said, “Only 5 percent of the association’s membership can qualify for a Fellows Award. Dr. Dillon can be proud his accomplishments are recognized by his peers as outstanding contributions to the association and the profession.”

AIHA has 13,000 members and is headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. The association is dedicated to protecting employee health, improving the work environment, and advancing the quality of the profession.

Susan Allen Voted Outstanding Woman

UAB School of Public Health AIDS researcher Susan Allen was voted UAB’s 2000 Outstanding Woman Faculty Member. The UAB Outstanding Woman Awards are presented annually by the UAB Women’s Center and the UAB Women’s Studies Program.

Allen is an AIDS researcher and an associate professor in the UAB School of Public Health’s Department of Epidemiology and International Health. Since 1986 she has lived and worked in Rwanda and Zambia, directing AIDS research projects including the UAB AIDS Center International Core. Allen investigates the natural history of HIV in heterosexual, monogamous couples and the effect of voluntary counseling and testing services on reducing HIV transmission in couples. In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, Allen created a fund to provide school fees for Rwandan orphans.

The UAB Outstanding Woman Awards recognize women faculty, staff, students, and community leaders who have served or mentored other women, taken a courageous stance, or overcome adversity. Candidates for the award are nominated by Birmingham residents and selected by a 10-member committee.

Joint Doctoral Program Ranks Number 7 Nationally

A joint UAB-University of Alabama health education and health promotion doctoral program ranks seventh in the nation in productivity and scholarly activity of students, based on a study published in the April issue of the *Journal of Health Education*.

The UAB-University of Alabama Health Education and Health Promotion program is offered jointly by the UAB School of Public Health’s Department of Health Behavior, the UAB School of Education’s health-education program, and the University of Alabama health-studies program.

The national ranking is significant. It marks the first time that the Journal has ranked a doctoral program in health education. In addition, the UAB-University of Alabama program is a young program, initiated in 1992. Scholars and leaders in the health education field rank schools based on external funding, the number of articles in leading journals, mentoring and placement, student activity such as teaching and research, and student support in the form of research funding and assistantships.

The study ranked 28 doctoral programs throughout the country and was conducted by researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Alabama. The UAB-University of Alabama doctoral program ranked behind Indiana University, University of Texas-Houston, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Illinois at Chicago, and the University of Michigan.

Grants totaling $4 million have been awarded to program faculty to support research and service activities. Grants include a five-year $2.49 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to investigate smoking cessation during pregnancy; a three-year $573,000 grant from the NIH Office of Adolescent Pregnancy for the Pickens County Family Life Project; and $44,500 from the Cancer Research Foundation of America for a pilot project to increase health instruction in Alabama schools.
Felicia James Morton, M.S.P.H., 1993 (Health Behavior), has accepted a position with Grady Health System in Atlanta, Georgia, to coordinate patient education for Grady Hospital, Hughes Spalding Children’s Hospital, and the 11 Grady Health System neighborhood clinics.

John Little, J.D., M.S.P.H., 1999 (Health Care Organization and Policy), has been named director of corporate compliance at Youth Family Centered Services, Inc. (YFCS) in Austin, Texas. YFCS operates psychiatric hospitals, intermediate care facilities for the mentally retarded, outpatient mental health clinics, home health services, and group homes in 12 states.

Alumna of the Year

Native Alabamian LTC Heidi Overstreet, Chief, Field Preventive Medicine Division, U.S. Army Medical Service Corps, has been named the UAB School of Public Health 2000 Alumna of the Year. Overstreet is from Brewton, Alabama. She received a B.S. degree in biology from the University of Alabama in 1981, an M.S. degree in biology from Jacksonville State University in 1992, and an M.S.P.H. degree in Environmental Health Sciences from UAB in 1994. Overstreet began her military career in 1981. Her military accomplishments including formation of the Field Preventive Medicine Division.

Conference Call

Annual Meeting Reunites Alumni

“In addition to being a learning event, the conference has become a reunion and celebration of friendship,” says Joan Ohrn, director of the office of alumni relations at UAB’s School of Public Health. Ohrn’s comment refers to a group of alumni, faculty members—both current and former, staff, and friends who for more than 14 years have met at the annual week-long American Industrial Hygiene Conference.

This year more than 80 alumni of the school’s industrial hygiene program attended the conference, which was held in May in Orlando, Florida.

“This is a unique group of alumni, who give to the school and each other in so many ways,” Ohrn says. “In addition to having created a strong network among themselves, they reach out to our students to provide guidance, internships, and help with professional placement. Group members participate in our school activities, lecture, teach classes, and contribute financially to support the school and its mission. They’re a special group of people. I’m proud to work with them and call them my friends.”

At the annual gathering, Donna Ringo, M.S.P.H., 1982, and Mike Cleveland, M.S.P.H., 1985, were recognized for challenging fellow alumni to raise $10,000 for the Vernon E. Rose Endowed Scholarship Fund by May 23. Beyond all expectations, alumni and friends of the program helped raise more than $15,000 in just three months. The scholarship, which is awarded annually to a student enrolled in the industrial hygiene program, is named for Vernon E. Rose, former chair of the Department of Environmental Health Sciences and founder of the school’s industrial hygiene program.

A special moment for attending alumni was recognition of the 2000 UAB School of Public Health Alumna of the Year LTC Heidi Overstreet, U.S. Army. At UAB, Overstreet was enrolled in the industrial hygiene program. She earned an M.S.P.H. in environmental health sciences in 1994.
Who’s Who in Who’s Who

Mohammad Aminul Islam, M.D., M.Sc., M.P.H., a doctoral candidate in epidemiology has been named to Who’s Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges. Islam was presented with a certificate of award by UAB Vice President of Student Affairs Virginia D. Gauld.

International Students Honored

UAB School of Public Health epidemiology doctoral student Madhav Bhatta of Nepal was inducted into the Beta Nu Chapter of Phi Beta Delta Honor Society for International Scholars at the recent 2000 International Awards Banquet. The society promotes interdisciplinary contacts and the exchange of ideas in the area of international affairs. Members include students, faculty, and staff who are selected on the basis of their international involvement, scholarly accomplishments, and contributions to the internationalization of UAB. Public health doctoral student Bakary Drammeh of The Gambia also was inducted into the honor society. The induction ceremony and awards banquet were held at the UAB Smolian International House.

International Awards Banquet

Public Health Students Recognized

Each year, UAB’s International Programs holds an International Awards Banquet, sponsored by Alabama Power Company, to honor international students who have excelled academically.

Four major awards are presented, including the prestigious Alabama Power Foundation Outstanding Achievement Award, which S. M. Atiqur Rahman of Bangladesh won in 1999. He also was nominated for the Graduate Academic Excellence Award. In addition, Rahman was inducted into Phi Beta Delta, as were public health students Mohammad Aminul Islam, Ricardo Izurieta, and Girishanthy Krishnarajah.

Rahman was selected for the outstanding achievement award based on his work with the Jefferson County IDDM (Insulin Dependent Diabetes Mellitus) Registry—one of several U.S. and international population-based diabetes registries. Rahman is co-director of the Jefferson County registry. The IDDM registries were established to gain insight into the causes of IDDM by tracking trends in incidence, patterns of risk (including age of onset), sex and race differences, seasonal distributions, and changing trends over time.

“The Jefferson County IDDM Registry is one of the oldest juvenile-onset diabetes registries in the United States,” Rahman says. “And it’s one of two registries in the U.S. that participated in the DiaMond project, a worldwide study conducted by the World Health Organization to investigate the etiology of type 1 diabetes. Currently, we’re writing a paper on ‘seasonality and epidemicity in the incidence of insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus in Jefferson County, Alabama, from 1979 to 1995 and focusing on the long-term pattern of IDDM incidence among whites and blacks.’
Special Awards

A Round of Applause, Please

Annual School of Public Health Awards Luncheon

The UAB School of Public Health recently held its 2nd Annual Awards Luncheon to recognize the achievements of faculty and staff. More than 130 people attended the luncheon, which was held at The Club in Homewood, Alabama.

At the top of the staff achievement recognition list was director of administrative and fiscal affairs Ada Mailhot, who oversaw the completion of the interior of the Ryals Building. “Ada dealt with countless details and addressed a daunting number of complaints and concerns quickly,” Dean Eli Capilouto said in recognizing Mailhot’s contributions. “Some of the problems Ada deftly handled included noise, dust, false fire alarms, allergic reactions, plumbing problems, power outages, parking, maintenance, change orders, and let’s not forget the hallways. The list goes on. And Ada did all of this on top of her many other duties as director of administrative and fiscal affairs at our school.”

In the wake of Hurricane Mitch last year, Mailhot led a massive relief effort for her native country of Honduras. More than a million pounds of food, clothing, and medicine were collected and shipped to those in need. This year, she helped a child and his family who had traveled to Children’s Hospital from Latin America for urgent medical care. “Anytime I pay Ada a compliment,” Capilouto said, “she immediately gives credit to all those who work with her throughout the school. Her kindness and caring in and out of the workplace lift spirits and raised a building.”

Ovations for Innovations

The 1999-2000 academic year marked the beginning of one of the most ambitious curriculum reforms in the country, Capilouto told the audience. “To reach our current pinnacle of successful curriculum reform, we turned to innovators with an iconoclastic irreverence for the established way of doing things. It’s risky to do this, but only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly. These imaginative groups consisted of faculty, staff, and students, including Ayesha Bryant, Stuart Capper, Susie Davies, Jack Duncan, Hala Fawal, Laura Gibney, Peter Ginter, Jane Hazelrig, Carol Hickey, Mary Hovinga, Bob Jacobs, Charles Katholi, Kathy Kirk, Connie Kohler, Michael Maetz, Kent Oestenstad, Joan Ohrn, Gail Parrish, Jeff Roseman, Joseph Telfair, John Waterbor, Dale Williams, and Donna Petersen.”

Three innovative approaches in public health education have been incorporated into the curriculum, including Public Health Grand Rounds, a program that began in fall 1998 and one that has brought public health leaders from around the world to UAB. Another new course teaches public health practitioners to quickly synthesize, integrate, and apply complex knowledge and analytical skills in responding to infectious disease outbreaks, environmental disasters, and bioterrorism, as well as crafting programs for recreational and occupational safety and assuring access to health care for vulnerable populations. Finally, the school’s newest program of study responds to the demands placed on public health professionals. In the past, students were taught in isolated block courses within the five core disciplines: biostatistics, epidemiology, health behavior, environmental health, and health policy and management. UAB’s revised curriculum calls for these disciplines to be integrated, and students will apply acquired skills to real-world public health issues, under the supervision of a faculty team from the various disciplines.

CEPH Self Study

Donna Petersen, associate dean for academic affairs, was recognized at the awards luncheon for her efforts in implementing a “self study”—a requirement of reaccreditation by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). CEPH is the agency responsible for
School of Public Health faculty member Michael Morrisey was named Distinguished Faculty Investigator.

**One of a Kind**

“Jane Hazelrig, who recently retired from UAB, was a valuable member of the faculty for 35 years,” Capilouto said. He then presented Hazelrig with a proclamation issued by the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees in recognition of her many accomplishments and honoring her with emerita status.

**Distinguished Researcher**

For his outstanding research in the area of health care policy, **Michael Morrisey** was awarded the UAB School of Public Health Distinguished Faculty Investigator Award. “Wise policymakers turn to the experts,” Capilouto said, “and we have one of the nation’s best at UAB. His work debunks myths, reveals truth, and is the stuff that makes for better policy. He has shown us that the effects of a new policy can be worse than the original problem, leaving lessons to guide us in the future. In addition, he has written more than 100 articles for topnotch peer-reviewed journals, and he has been lead or co-investigator on 25 major extramural funded research programs. His discoveries bring his classroom alive with discussions on the latest issues. Year after year students give him outstanding evaluations.”

Thanks to funds from the Hill Crest Foundation, the Distinguished Faculty Investigator Award—as well as the other faculty awards—received a monetary gift.

**Internet Impresario**

**Stuart Capper** was awarded the Faculty Award for Outstanding Public Health Service in recognition of his service to the public health community. “Five years ago Stuart pioneered web-based education to reach the public health workforce,” Capilouto said. “These public health professionals study on and off-line at their office, home, or in airplanes. They communicate heavily with each other through structured chat rooms. Distance learning is creating a revolution in education and Stuart Capper, wisely, has been among those at the head of the pack.”

**Outstanding Teacher**

**Aaron Stinnett** was the School of Public Health’s recipient of the 2000 President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. The teaching award was officially presented at an earlier ceremony presided over by UAB President W. Ann Reynolds. “When we recruited Aaron Stinnett,” Capilouto said, “Dr. Milton Weinstein of Harvard University, the father of medical decision analysis, said Aaron was one of his top doctoral students during his 25 years of teaching. Yale University places him among ‘the very best health decision-analysis and cost-effectiveness theorists of his generation.’ In 1999, one of his papers won the Society for Medical Decision Making award for ‘Outstanding Paper.’”

**No Place Like Home**

In his closing remarks, Capilouto recognized new faculty members, who are new to Alabama. “Alabama is unique among states,” he said. “We have the highest percentage of native residents of any state in the country, which in turn makes this
gathering of the School of Public Health faculty unique. All of our faculty members, with the exception of one, are not natives.

“French historian Alexis de Toqueville said the only way American individuality and freedom can flourish is via the empowerment that comes through participation of diverse constituencies in communities. Diversity is a strength. It’s UAB’s strength.

“As the only native Alabamian on the faculty, it has been particularly gratifying to play a role in recruiting 25 faculty members during my tenure. And our newest three members are typically diverse in discipline, ethnicity, and culture. One is a female Asian-American health economist specializing in aging and aging policy. One is a female African-American behavioral scientist who can help us discover the genetic explanation for why some people are more susceptible to environmental agents, such as alcohol, than others. Our school—your school—will work from the cellular to community levels to improve life.

“All of these new faculty members chose to come to UAB over other prestigious academic health centers. I know these new shining stars, together with our present shining stars, will burn brightly in Alabama and throughout the world. Their work will be felt by you, your children, and your children’s children.

“My daughter Emily and I share an appreciation for the poetry of Langston Hughes, who penned the 1930s poem “Daybreak in Alabama.” The poem serves as an anthem of hope for many Alabamians. The speaker of the poem is a composer who metaphorically assembles those diverse constituencies that Toqueville says empower a community when they work together. For our School of Public Health, it is daybreak in Alabama.”

Daybreak in Alabama
When I get to be a composer
I’m gonna write me some music about
Daybreak in Alabama
And I’m gonna put the purtiest songs in it
Rising out of the ground like a swamp mist
And falling out of heaven like soft dew.
I’m gonna put some tall tall trees in it
And the scent of pine needles
And the smell of red clay after rain
And long red necks
And poppy colored faces
And big brown arms
And the field daisy eyes
Of black and white black white black people
And I’m gonna put white hands
And black hands and brown and yellow hands
And red clay earth hands in it
Touching everybody with kind fingers
And touching each other natural as dew
In that dawn of music when I
Get to be a composer
And write about daybreak
In Alabama. 

Langston Hughes
The UAB School of Public Health has received $100,000 from the William Randolph Hearst Foundations to establish a scholarship endowment for minority graduate students. "The Hearst Foundations’ grants to education are extremely competitive and primarily focus on the establishment of endowed scholarships for undergraduate students at private, liberal arts colleges and universities," says Ligia Cravo, program officer.

The Board of Trustees of the University of Alabama System has designated the Kathleen Ellis Ryals Endowed Scholarship as a pure endowment—which means the scholarship funds must be maintained in perpetuity as stated by the donor—of UAB. The scholarship honors UAB School of Public Health friend Kathleen Ellis Ryals, who passed away in January 1999. Scholarships will be awarded to deserving School of Public Health students.

Mrs. Ryals was born Kathleen Virginia Ellis on July 23, 1909, in Lowndes County, Alabama, and graduated from Lowndes County High School in Fort Deposit, Alabama, in 1926. She attended Livingston Normal School for Teachers and taught school in Alabama for 10 years.

"Mrs. Ryals was committed to improving the health and welfare of the citizens of Alabama and the world," says Eli Capilouto, dean of the UAB School of Public Health, "and she was a true friend to the school’s students, faculty, and staff."

Mrs. Ryals’s son, Jarvis D. Ryals, a neurologist practicing in Pueblo, Colorado, and a School of Public Health benefactor, exemplified his devotion to his parents through the gift he made to UAB that resulted in the construction of the Frank and Kathleen Ellis Ryals School of Public Health Building. Ryals is a 1973 graduate of the University of Alabama. School of Medicine.

Birmingham neurologist Steven Rudd is a sixth-generation Alabaman. “I guess we just didn’t know we were free to move on,” he says of his long line of ancestors.

Rudd has strong UAB ties as well. Not only did he receive his M.D. from the University of Alabama School of Medicine in 1976, but he also recently became a member of the School of Public Health advisory board. Rudd’s interest in public health dates back to 1994, when he earned a master’s degree in public health from Harvard. Before establishing his neurology practice in Birmingham in 1980, he worked as a health policy advisor for both the U.S. Food and Drug Agency in Washington, D.C., and the former Congressional Office of Technology Assessment.

Rudd believes that the School of Public Health is poised to address many of Alabama’s public health concerns, such as the effects of diet, exercise, smoking, and the environment on disease development.

“Certain diseases are rampant in Alabama,” he says. “And they affect all of us, regardless of social or economic status. Poor Alabamians aren’t the only people struggling with or affected by heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancers related to tobacco use. These diseases can strike anyone without warning.”

As a member of the school’s advisory board, Rudd has taken a keen interest in curriculum development, even providing seed money to strengthen courses.

“Many potential donors don’t realize just how important curriculum development is—or that it requires external funding in order to progress,” says Rudd. “A school’s curriculum usually comes in under the radar, so to speak, when grants are awarded. UAB’s public health curriculum is continually growing and developing, so much can be accomplished even with small gifts and contributions.”

Rudd credits Donna Petersen, associate dean for academic affairs, with implementing innovative learning strategies such as distance learning and classroom case studies, in which students employ techniques from all of the school’s disciplines to find creative solutions to public health problems.

“We all reap the benefits many times over by investing in solving some of Alabama’s serious public health problems.”

Rudd is also interested in one day establishing a UAB School of Public Health media fellowship. Each year a practicing...
for the Hearst Foundations. “UAB’s School of Public Health—a public, graduate school—is an exception to this policy. It is an outstanding school.”

“The Foundations realize the value of public health education in Alabama and see a real need here, especially since we receive limited state funding,” says Mark Haney, development director for the school.

Philanthropist William Randolph Hearst established The Hearst Foundation, Inc. in 1945 and the William Randolph Hearst Foundations in 1948 as independent, private foundations, operating separately from the Hearst Corporation. The Foundations’ charitable goals—education, health, culture, and social service—reflect the philanthropic interests of their founder and seek to provide opportunities to underserved populations nationwide.

A journalist would be awarded a fellowship to foster in-depth reporting on the finer points of public health issues. Harvard had such a program when Rudd was a student there.

In addition, he thinks Harvard’s Center for Health Communication, headed by Jay Winsten who initiated the designated-driver campaign, could serve as a model for a future, smaller-scale media center at UAB’s School of Public Health.

Rudd feels strongly that UAB’s public health and medical schools “should work hand-in-hand. There’s much the two schools can accomplish together, particularly given public health’s special mission to safeguard the health of the citizenry.”

Besides his medical and philanthropic accomplishments, Rudd writes mysteries set in the medical world. His passion for writing fiction developed during his “insomniac” resident days at Vanderbilt. Currently, his agent is “flacking one of my murder mysteries featuring a lion-hearted young woman who is both Alabama-born and a Harvard-trained forensic shrink.”

The plot thickens. It could be that Rudd’s career path will take a mysterious turn. Stay tuned for clues.
Hill Crest Foundation Grant
Supporting Public Health Awards

The Hill Crest Foundation has awarded a five-year $25,000 grant to UAB’s School of Public Health to support the School’s annual public health awards for the next five years.

The awards were created in 1999 to honor professionals and volunteers whose contributions have helped improve public health in Alabama and throughout the world. Peter Cowin, businessman and member of the school’s advisory board, suggested that the awards carry a monetary gift, and he stepped forward to make this possible for the first round of awards.

“The public health awards are designed to draw John Q. Public’s attention to the importance and immediacy of public health,” says Eli Capilouto, dean of the school. “We also want to encourage young men and women to pursue careers in this vital and rewarding profession.”

The Hill Crest grant will fund four different awards of $1,000 each—the Alabama Public Health Hero Award, the School of Public Health Distinguished Faculty Investigator Award, the Faculty Award for Outstanding Public Health Service, and the UAB School of Public Health Alumnus/Alumna of the Year Award.

The first Alabama Public Health Hero Award was presented to Sandral Hullett, a physician and graduate of the University of Alabama School of Medicine and a member of the University of Alabama System’s board of trustees. The award recognizes unsung heroes of public health in Alabama.

The Distinguished Faculty Investigator Award acknowledges the efforts of a faculty member to improve the health of citizens in Alabama and throughout the world.

The Alumnus/Alumna of the Year Award recognizes alumni contributions to improve public health, not only in Alabama, but anywhere in the world.

“The Hill Crest grant will help draw attention to some of the school’s significant public health initiatives,” says Mark Haney, development director. “It will also encourage talented, dedicated students to enroll in our graduate programs. And we believe that the awards will motivate more people in the community to give financial assistance to our research and teaching efforts.”

The UAB School of Public Health Newsletter is published quarterly by the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health in cooperation with the Office of Public Relations and Marketing.

PLEASE DIRECT QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND SUGGESTIONS TO:
ELI CAPILOUTO, D.M.D., M.P.H., SC.D., DEAN
PHONE: (205) 975-7742; FAX (205) 975-7536
E-MAIL: ELI.CAPILOUTO@UAB.EDU

The UAB School of Public Health Newsletter STAFF:
EXECUTIVE EDITOR PAM POWELL MANAGING EDITOR JO LYNN ORR
ART DIRECTOR AMY RAGLAND DEVELOPMENT EDITOR MARK HANEY
WRITERS MAURY M. BREECHER, PH.D., M.P.H., AND JO LYNN ORR