

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee
Helen Bader School of Social Welfare
P.O. Box 786, Milwaukee, WI 53201
(414) 229-5008, Fax (414) 229-2872

www.cabhr.uwm.edu

PARTNERS IN HOPE Collaboration Strengthens CABHR Research

CABHR scientists know that the best research rarely comes from toiling alone. Instead, it requires teamwork with a variety of partners. Over its 20-year history, CABHR has worked closely with a range of collaborators: Milwaukee residents, community agencies, businesses, local institutions, and fellow researchers within UW–Milwaukee and at other universities.

A collaborative approach is increasingly common among social science researchers, says CABHR director Michael Fendrich, Ph.D. “We’re moving away from the notion that science is conducted in silos,” he says. “Everything we do is enhanced when we team up with other people who complement our work and add depth to the level of expertise.”

Learning From Local Residents

Because many CABHR scientists pursue community-based research, they especially value their relationships with local residents. CABHR scientist Laura Otto-Salaj, Ph.D., principal investigator of the Stories to Tell (STT) project, disagrees with researchers who drop into a community briefly to collect data and then leave. She prefers a very different approach, “where we’re working together with community members and problem-solving to get the highest quality research possible.”

STT, which studies risk and resiliency in African American women who live in Milwaukee housing developments, has been guided in part by focus groups of African American women. In fact, a focus group created the study’s name.

The study involves asking women hundreds of personal questions on topics such as mental health history and past and current sexual behavior. Project coordinator Daana Townsend says she and the STT team have worked hard to gain the women’s trust. The first step in that process involved seeking the blessing of the residence councils at the housing developments where the women live. The project team visited the councils to make presentations about the study, and they continue to attend community events. Their goal is to convey that they don’t intend to “research and run,” but to become a permanent part of the community.

The best evidence of that intention is CABHR’s Community Research Center (CRC). The CRC is home to four projects: STT,



COLLABORATION IN ACTION: CABHR’s Community Research Center

- Founded March 1, 2009
- Home to four projects, representing \$6.2 million in research funding
- Employs 41 staff members and students
- Site of 339 research participant interviews to date

the Milwaukee Young Parenthood Study (MYPS) led by CABHR scientist Paul Florsheim, Ph.D., Keeping Families Together led by CABHR scientist Susan Rose, Ph.D., and the HIV Communication Study headed by CABHR affiliated scientist Katie Mosack, Ph.D. Located on North Martin Luther King Drive, the CRC is next to the YWCA, a community landmark. “It’s centrally located for people who are living and working in the community, especially African American men and women,” Dr. Otto-Salaj says. The center features comfortable furniture and colorful art. “We wanted to create an environment where people felt comfortable and wanted to come back, rather than a sterile clinical office,” she says.

Community Agencies and Other Institutions

Community agencies are also valuable research partners, in part because they offer expertise in the topics CABHR scientists study. They also provide opportunities to test new interventions. CABHR affiliated scientists Josh Mersky, Ph.D., and Dimitri Topitzes, Ph.D., have teamed up with St. Aemilian-Lakeside, a family services organization, on a study of a new foster-parent training program called Project Connect. It’s based on Parent-Child Interaction

Eleventh Floor View LESSONS FROM LESLIE

By Michael Fendrich, Ph.D., CABHR Director

In this column a year ago, I touted an innovative collaboration between CABHR and the Department of English. A writing instructor teamed with a teacher and long-time practitioner of meditation to develop a course to reduce stress and enhance learning for student veterans returning to UW–Milwaukee. As a member of the evaluation team for this project, I was excited that we might stimulate much-needed evidenced-based programming for students exposed to combat in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This project was a personal milestone of sorts, marking the first time in my career that I worked on a research project with my wife, Leslie Whitaker, an accomplished writer and successful teacher at UW–Milwaukee. I fondly recall attending planning meetings for this project with CABHR scientist Dimitri Topitzes (my partner on the evaluation team), and meditation teacher Wesley Van Linda. Dimitri and Wesley have contrasting perspectives on meditation and mindfulness, which led to some heated debates. But the four of us explored the topic with open-minded curiosity and gained a deeper understanding of each other’s views. The process strengthened our shared commitment to this innovative project.

Although Leslie and I were life partners as husband and wife for nearly three decades, our one professional collaboration was never completed. Shortly after my last column was published, Leslie developed symptoms of Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, a rare and fatal neurological disease to which she succumbed in March 2011.

As I reflect on the theme of this issue, I realize how central the collaborative process was to my late wife’s life. She firmly believed that progress in any area depended on the integration of diverse perspectives and collaboration among people who each brought something unique to the table. Leslie loved that exposure to diversity and opposition could broaden our perspectives, enhance the quality of our thinking, and ultimately,



Leslie firmly believed that progress depended on collaboration among people who each brought something unique to the table.

improve the quality of our work. In her class on creativity, she developed an exercise that required students to interview people with whom they strongly disagreed. This process fostered mutual trust between opponents, enabled students to better understand the basis of their own beliefs, and triggered their creative juices.

In retrospect, our unfinished project also captured the essence of collaboration: getting people with different perspectives and strengths to trust one another and work together toward a common goal. These memories and my recent life experiences have led me to think about the bigger picture. One of the joys of human existence is the capacity to form relationships and to go through life with people we love, trust, and respect. It is harder, more painful, less productive, and less fulfilling to “go it alone,” in research projects and in life. As human beings with a limited lifespan, we cannot lose sight of the importance of human relationships, the sharing of

diverse perspectives, and the process of gaining mutual trust—all ingredients of successful collaboration—in our quest to make a difference.

CABHR scientists met recently to review and revise the center’s mission statement. In this meeting we decided to replace the word “Addiction” in our center’s name with the word “Applied.” I

am excited about this change and think it will more clearly convey the extent of our broad-based, collaborative work. Soon we will be known as the “Center for Applied Behavioral Health Research.” We are beginning the university process to officially change the name.

At the end of a recent presentation by Young Cho (a new Zilber School of Public Health faculty member and CABHR scientist), I heard myself saying “I hope this leads to more publications and grants.” I immediately caught myself and realized

Continued on next page

WHAT IS CABHR?

Based in the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee’s Helen Bader School of Social Welfare, CABHR is a research center led by core academic scientists with broad interests in applied behavioral health. CABHR conducts cutting-edge epidemiological and clinical research. Its scientists currently hold \$7.8 million in research grants.

NEWS BRIEFS

Project Connect Earns NIH Grant for Foster Parent Training

This summer, CABHR affiliated scientists **Josh Mersky, Ph.D.**, and **Dimitri Topitzes, Ph.D.**, received a two-year grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development to fund Project Connect, a study evaluating a new intervention for foster families.

Based on Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, the intervention teaches parenting skills to foster parents in a group setting. Drs. Mersky and Topitzes have partnered with St. Aemilian-Lakeside to conduct the study with the agency's clinicians and foster parents.

Tina Freiburger Receives MillerCoors Grant to Educate Retailers

CABHR affiliated scientist **Tina Freiburger, Ph.D.**, received a grant through the MillerCoors Retail Partnership Project, which allows her to develop and produce a series of videos for alcohol retailers, describing difficult situations their businesses typically face, and proposing solutions.

Topics include chronically inebriated customers and litter in front of stores, which is linked to social problems including crime. Another film explores ways for alcohol retailers to forge relationships with neighborhood coalitions. Retailers will be surveyed before and after they watch the videos to determine if the videos affect their understanding of these issues.

Dr. Freiburger received the grant with colleague **Will Pelfrey, Ph.D.**, a CABHR affiliated scientist who is now associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Michael Fendrich Named Wisconsin Distinguished Professor

CABHR director **Michael Fendrich, Ph.D.**, recently received a Wisconsin Distinguished Professorship, which honors and supports individuals who are respected by their peers, and whose scholarship and service have the potential to benefit Wisconsin's economy. Professors serve for a five-year term.

The award will support Dr. Fendrich's work with students and faculty at the School of Pharmacy at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon. **John Dellinger,**

chair of the Department of Pharmaceutics and Administrative Sciences and Associate Dean for Research at Concordia, invited Dr. Fendrich to give lectures and seminars sharing his expertise in drug addiction, and to develop research related to prescription medication abuse in collaboration with Concordia faculty.

Laura Otto-Salaj receives Social Work Research Award

CABHR scientist **Laura Otto-Salaj, Ph.D.**, associate professor of social work, received the Social Work Research Award at the annual Helen Bader School of Social Welfare awards banquet in May. This annual award recognizes a faculty member who has made significant and lasting research contributions to the study of social work.

Dr. Otto-Salaj is currently leading the \$2.9 million Stories to Tell project, studying risk and resilience in African-American women.

Fendrich Receives Grant to Share Drug Abuse and Sexual Risk Data

CABHR director **Michael Fendrich, Ph.D.**, recently received a grant that will allow him to prepare data from a Chicago-based study of drug abuse and sexual risk behavior so it can be included in the Inter-University Consortium of Political and Social Research (ICPSR) Substance Abuse Data Archive, based at the University of Michigan.

The Chicago study, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, recruited one of the few probability samples of gay and bisexual men during the rise of club drug use nationally and locally. Once archived, these data will provide other researchers the opportunity to test additional hypotheses related to high-risk sexual behavior and substance use.

Mental Health Task Force Seeks Research Partners

The Milwaukee Mental Health Task Force, a broad coalition of more than 60 member organizations, aims to improve local mental health services, reduce stigma, and give consumers and families a strong voice.

Barbara Beckert, Milwaukee Office Director of Disability Rights Wisconsin,

which coordinates the task force, welcomes partnerships with UW–Milwaukee researchers in mental health services.

Possible research topics in Milwaukee County include the high rate of involuntary treatment and emergency detentions at the Milwaukee County Mental Health Complex (MCMHC), and the lack of alternative crisis treatment facilities and community-based services; the revolving door problem of people recurrently admitted, discharged, and then readmitted to MCMHC; barriers to mental health services among lower-income communities, especially racial and ethnic minorities, and resulting treatment delays; and opportunities to develop more consumer-run services and successful models.

Interested researchers should contact Ms. Beckert at 414-773-4646 or barbara.beckert@drwi.org, to attend the monthly meetings of the Task Force. See the meeting schedule at www.milwaukeeemhtf.org.

Eleventh Floor View

continued from page 2

this comment was short-sighted. While our center's survival depends on publications and grants, its financial viability is not the ultimate goal. The center's value, in my opinion, depends on our ability to make a difference to both science and society. As scientists, we need to think about how our work helps to advance current theories. At the same time, we are behavioral scientists strongly linked to the helping and health professions, dedicated to informing policies and practices in ways that directly improve the lives of people in need. These ideas will certainly be incorporated into our new mission statement. I hope we can also integrate them into our everyday research practices.

To share your thoughts on this column, please email me at Fendrich@uwm.edu. For information on the staff award established in memory of my wife, Leslie Whitaker, see www4.uwm.edu/lets/english/news/index.cfm#whitakeraward.

MEET CABHR SCIENTISTS



**Jennifer Doering,
Ph.D., R.N.**

*CABHR Scientist
Assistant Professor of
Nursing
UW-Milwaukee*

Dr. Doering studies the connection between sleep and health in poor, urban women. She is currently testing an intervention to promote sleep and reduce fatigue in new mothers.

She believes the topic of sleep is an important addition to CABHR's research agenda, and that it deserves more attention in general. "When you don't get good sleep, it affects all areas of your life, just as alcohol and drug addiction and psychological illness do," she says.

In her work with new moms, Dr. Doering has utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative research involved interviews of depressed and nondepressed new mothers to get first-hand accounts of sleep and fatigue in the months after childbirth. She wanted to hear about the experience from the mothers themselves. "I believe they're the authorities who can help guide advances in science," she says.

That research led to her current project, a pilot study funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research, which will test an intervention she designed to help new moms self-manage their sleep problems and fatigue. Each participant wears a wrist actigraph, a wrist-watch-like device that senses movement. (A person's wrist is particularly still when they're asleep, Dr. Doering says.) The device allows Dr. Doering to estimate how much time over three days and nights a woman sleeps, and how often she wakes. The intervention will teach mothers practical strategies and facilitate decision-making to help them and their babies sleep better. Lack of sleep has been linked to postpartum depression, but in a previous study, Dr. Doering found that a woman's perception of how she slept influenced depression symptoms much more than how much she actually slept.

She will use this pilot data for a larger study in the future. "We need to do something about postpartum sleep loss," Dr. Doering says. "It has incredible implications for health, for infant development, and for economic security in these mothers."

PARTNERS IN HOPE continued from page 1

Therapy (PCIT), which teaches parents ways to handle difficult behaviors in their children. Drs. Mersky and Topitzes wanted to see if they could successfully apply this therapy to families with foster children, and to teach it in a group format, making it less expensive to administer.

They trained St. Aemilian clinicians to share these skills in two-day workshops for foster parents that started this fall. Why did St. Aemilian agree to participate? Dr. Topitzes believes the agency liked the chance to improve the services they provide to foster parents, and they responded to the intervention's user-friendly design. "We wanted genuine implications for child welfare practices," Dr. Mersky says. "We designed this with them in mind."

But relying heavily on such agencies, as well as institutions like hospitals, requires flexibility. Employees are busy, and research isn't their top priority, so it falls on the scientists to be especially accommodating. Megan Howard, MYPS project coordinator, checks frequently with staff at the prenatal clinics where her team recruits study participants. (MYPS aims to help pregnant teens and their partners develop the interpersonal skills to parent together, even if they aren't romantically involved.) Howard wants to ensure that researchers aren't disrupting clinic routines, and she often brings treats to thank staff for their continued support of the project. "They're doing a lot of work for us that's above and beyond their normal duties, and we really do appreciate that," Howard says.

For going above and beyond in helping the STT team, the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee recently received the Research Collaboration Award from the Helen Bader School of Social Welfare. "The point of the award is to honor and celebrate really terrific community collaborators who understand the value of research," Dr. Otto-Salaj says.

CABHR scientist Lisa Berger, Ph.D., has gained insight into collaboration through her project with three local agencies that are brainstorming ways to integrate drug and alcohol treatment services into existing mental health programs. The late Hirsh Larkey, Psy.D., director of psychological services at Jewish Family Services and the driving force behind this project, asked Dr. Berger to study the working relationship of the three partner agencies, and recommend ways to

strengthen the collaboration if needed.

Dr. Berger says this project has taught her the importance of selecting the right team members. For example, one consultant on the project, psychologist Gary Hollander, Ph.D., has particular experience in facilitating collaborations. Dr. Berger says he has worked to make the three partner agencies feel valued, which has helped them commit to moving forward together. This kind of environment will allow them to "come up with something pretty unique," Berger predicts.

Reaching Out to Other Researchers

In the early stages of Project Connect, Drs. Mersky and Topitzes reviewed existing research on PCIT and found an article about teaching the therapy in group settings, written by Cheryl McNeil, Ph.D., a psychologist at West Virginia University. When they contacted her they discovered that Dr. McNeil is a master PCIT trainer, who studied under PCIT's founder. She has come to Milwaukee several times to help train Project Connect clinicians, and she's helped design the foster parent intervention. "We're very lucky to have her on board," Dr. Mersky says.

It's equally beneficial to reach out to colleagues across campus, says CABHR scientist Paul Florsheim, Ph.D., who is also faculty chair in the Zilber School of Public Health. Dr. Florsheim says he chose to join CABHR in part because of the high quality grant support, the statistical and methodological consultation, and the opportunity to connect with the local community. He also values his CABHR colleagues who come from different disciplines and offer fresh perspectives.

"It certainly helps with the collaborative effort to have more than one part of the university involved," Dr. Florsheim says. "Different components of the university have different strengths. When I'm putting together a new project, I want to put together the best team possible."

No matter whom researchers collaborate with, there's no magic formula for maintaining those links, the researchers say. "It's just like any other relationship: you honor agreements, you work hard, you show a lot of respect," Dr. Topitzes says. "You call on them when you need them, you thank them, and you show a lot of gratitude."