



voices for a healthy future

A PUBLICATION OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE

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The Public Health Institute promotes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people through research and evaluation, training and technical assistance, and by building community partnerships.

Taking on Cancer: Prevention, Control, and Quality of Life

The Public Health Institute's (PHI) researchers currently conduct an impressive body of work in the arena of cancer. We have studied:

- Effectiveness of screening on early detection of various cancers including breast, cervical and prostate cancers
- Environmental contributors to the incidence and severity of cancer, including tobacco, pesticides and other carcinogens
- The impact of improved nutrition and increased physical activity on cancer prevention and control
- The importance of broad, population-based tobacco control programs in preventing cancer
- Family health and well-being over several generations in families impacted by cancer

Our organization proudly assists the State of California Department of Health Services in collaboratively operating the California Cancer Registry (CCR), the largest population-based cancer registry in the world. The availability of the extremely high quality data produced by CCR and its increased use by researchers in California and nationwide will advance the search for successful prevention and cancer control strategies.

According to the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries, cancer kills more than 1,500 people each day in the United States. In California alone, according to CCR data, 140 individuals die each day from cancer. The October 16, 2002 issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* reports that breast cancer incidence continues to rise.

Always aware of these sobering statistics, PHI will continue building its portfolio in cancer control and cancer research. We strive to both establish new partnerships and develop a cadre of next generation research leaders that will provide the basis for expanded opportunities for cancer control research at PHI. Future research will involve increased attention to early diagnosis and will further our understanding of environmental contributors, treatment differentials, survival disparities, and quality of care and quality of life issues for people with cancer and their families.

Importantly, PHI hopes this expansion of our work fighting against cancer will encourage researchers and policymakers nationwide to more fully utilize cancer registry data in their search for causes and cures, facilitate the training of emerging cancer epidemiologists, and continue to attract additional qualified scientists whose dedication to the fight against cancer will reduce the terrible toll this disease takes on our families and communities. ■

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To learn more about PHI's community of projects and programs, visit www.phi.org and check out our "Program Links" page. We provide links to the programs highlighted in this newsletter and many others.



Voices For A Healthy Future is a bi-annual publication of the Public Health Institute. This newsletter is posted at www.phi.org. For more information on the PHI community of programs and projects, contact:

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Dr. Barbara Cohn, far right, researches results with staff.

A Breast Cancer Scientist's Long-term Battle

Barbara Cohn, Ph.D. always knew that she wanted to study women's health. But the topic was new and untested in the 70's when she was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. In fact, a professor told her that she had to "pick a disease instead of a population." So she picked heart disease and studied it in women. Since then, her research has expanded to pregnancy, diabetes, and now to breast cancer—the most common cancer among women in California.

Dr. Cohn's research is unique. She studies whether events in early life affect breast cancer, going as far back as exposures in the womb. Her work is based on a very special resource: The Child Health and Development Studies (CHDS) database, founded more than 40 years ago by a famous U.C. Berkeley scientist, Dr. Jacob Yerushalmy. Women and their families entered the study between 1959 and 1967, during the mother's pregnancy.

"It is unusual for a study to survive 40 years or more—but that is exactly what is needed to understand the causes of cancer—a disease that may have its origin before birth," says Dr. Cohn, who succeeded Dr. Barbara J. van den Berg as CHDS's director in 1997.

Dr. Cohn is currently investigating how exposure in the 1960's to the pesticide DDT influenced mother's breast cancer risk 40 years later. Exposure is measured at an early age and is taken into account whether exposure happened during puberty when the breast is most vulnerable. This is an advance over past studies where researchers have had to estimate exposure in blood samples drawn after cancer occurs, and often many years after first exposure to the pesticide.

Dr. Cohn is also studying whether exposure to DDT in the womb influences pregnancy in the daughters 30 years later. "The ability to link research across two generations is not only unique, but vital to understanding how environmental exposures influence cancer risk. Pregnancy and cancer are linked in women," says Dr. Cohn.

Research conducted at the Center relies heavily on the data provided by the California Cancer Registry (CCR), a statewide population-based cancer surveillance system where every reportable cancer diagnosed in California is documented. Dr. Cohn values the partnership between her research and the service that CCR provides. "We couldn't do our research without them," she says.

Dr. Cohn is optimistic that a cure may be found in time to benefit the next generation, but her efforts are concentrated now on discovering the causes of breast cancer. Dr. Cohn hopes that this knowledge can contribute to finding a way to prevent the disease.

For more information about the Child Health and Development Studies, visit www.chdstudies.org.

A complete article on the California Cancer Registry is on page 3.



It's All About Saving Lives

CCR has a wealth of cancer-related publications in print and posted on its website. Visit www.ccrca.org for more information.

The California Cancer Registry (CCR) is devoted to a compelling mission: to protect the public by monitoring cancer rates, and to contribute to the search for cancer causes and cures. This mission may sound ambitious, but its goal is simple — a future free of cancer.

Cancer is not an abstract, faceless word. It is a real part of our lives. Cancer is the second most common cause of death, with only heart disease being more prevalent. According to the CCR statistics, about 135,000 Californians will be newly diagnosed with cancer this year.

As a statewide population-based cancer surveillance system, CCR documents every reportable cancer diagnosed in California. Led by William E. Wright, Ph.D., chief of the California Department of Health Services (CDHS) Cancer Surveillance Section, CCR is a collaboration of CDHS, the Public Health Institute (PHI), 10 regional registries, hospitals, and cancer researchers throughout the nation, such as breast cancer researcher Barbara Cohn mentioned in an earlier article.

PHI assists the state in collecting detailed information on cancer incidence, diagnosis, and treatment that furthers our understanding both of cancer and of strategies and policies for its prevention, and control. The availability of these data allow cancer researchers to analyze geographic, ethnic, occupational and other environmental differences that provide clues pointing to risk factors. The data also help determine where screening, early detection, and health education or other prevention programs should be directed.

PHI's C/NET Solutions project designs and maintains the CNEt data collection system for CCR. Under the leadership of Barry Gordon, Ph.D., a pioneer in developing national standards for data exchange, the C/NET project develops and provides computer software to cancer registries for statewide case reporting. As part of the California Cancer Reporting System, C/NET software is used in more than 240 hospitals to feed quality-checked data to the regional and state registries.

C/NET is developing new software to track other diseases and marketing its programs to hospitals and health data collection facilities around the country. This year C/NET will exhibit its software in California, Arizona, Texas, Massachusetts and Georgia.

CCR has a wealth of cancer-related publications in print and posted on its website. Log on to www.ccrca.org for more information.

No one knows when we will succeed in finding a cure for cancer, but everyday PHI and CCR together bring us a little closer to a cancer-free future. ■

PHI's Diversity Of Focus

PHI brings together diverse resources – government, academia, the private sector, and the community – to build effective efforts to improve the public's health. As a result, our projects and programs span many areas of public health practice, research, and applied research and focus on multiple geographical regions and target populations.

- Aging
- Alcohol
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- Cancer
- Chronic Disease
- Communicable / Infectious Disease
- Community Health
- Disability
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- Leadership Development
- Maternal and Child Health
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- Occupational Health
- Pharmaceutical Access
- Program Evaluation
- Rural Health
- Social and Behavioral Science
- Survey Research
- Tobacco
- Violence Prevention
- Welfare Reform
- Women's Health

To learn more, visit www.phi.org and click on our "Program Links" page.

SELECTED PROJECTS Technical Assistance Legal Center

The attorneys at the Technical Assistance Legal Center (TALC) enhance the work of public health advocates in formulating local tobacco control policies. TALC provides legal technical assistance to ensure that policies are effective, legal, and defensible. TALC's target audiences are: county health departments, elected officials, municipal attorneys, community health advocates and voluntary health organizations. TALC provides practical tools including model ordinances for communities on such topics as tobacco retailer licensing; zoning restrictions on tobacco retail outlets; self-service tobacco

display bans; storefront sign restrictions; options for those affected by exposure to secondhand smoke; community event sponsorship by the tobacco industry; enforcement of tobacco control laws; and divestment of public and other funds from tobacco stock.

A talented and committed Legal Team and Community Advisory Board guide TALC's work. The Legal Team is comprised of nationally known experts in First Amendment and preemption issues, including professors from the University of California at Berkeley Boalt Hall School of Law, and private practitioners specializing in municipal law. The Community Advisory Board includes representatives from local health departments, community organizations, and local government – playing a crucial role in ensuring that TALC is responsive to emerging tobacco control policy needs.

For more information about TALC, please visit www.phi.org/talc.

Exploring Tobacco Cessation Services on California College Campuses Project

Use of tobacco is the single most preventable cause of death in the U.S. Recent studies show that cigarette and cigar smoking cause at least 85% of all lung cancer illness. Lung cancer alone kills 14,000 Californians each year. Overall, one out of every three cancer deaths is due to tobacco.

According to Dianne C. Barker, M.H.S, PHI researcher and principal investigator for "The Exploring Tobacco Cessation Services on California College Campuses" project, helping people quit smoking can extend life and lower morbidity due to various cancers and other diseases. The project conducted focus groups to examine the awareness and preferences of cessation services on campuses by college students. The project also interviewed 30 college administrators to discuss challenges and opportunities for implementing comprehensive tobacco control interventions on campuses. A journal article on the findings of the study will be disseminated to researchers and advocates through the College Youth Advocacy Network website and presented at the National Conference on Tobacco or Health in San Francisco in November 2002. ■

PHI PROFILES

PHI is a proud partner in research leading to identification of causes and cures for cancer. Four PHI partners working with the California Cancer Registry (CCR) are profiled here.

Dr. Sharan Campleman, Ph.D., M.S., M.P.H., is a research scientist and principal investigator at PHI. She also currently serves as a regional epidemiologist for CCR. Her research focuses on analyzing the patterns of cancer screening, diagnosis and treatment in vulnerable rural and elderly populations. Additionally, Dr. Campleman continues to work on describing variation and trends in childhood cancer in California and is currently updating CCR monographs on childhood and adolescent cancer. Dr. Campleman completed her undergraduate and graduate studies in food biochemistry and food chemistry at U.C. Davis, and her Ph.D. and M.P.H. in environmental health sciences from U.C. Berkeley.



Dr. Rosemary Cress, Dr.PH., PHI principal investigator, has recently been appointed as research program director at CCR, where she leads the Cancer Epidemiology Research Unit of the Research and Surveillance Program. Dr. Cress previously spent four years at the University of California in San Francisco where she was involved in a large study of risk factors for cutaneous melanoma. Dr. Cress also served as one of the regional epidemiologists for CCR from 1995 to 2001. She received her doctorate in epidemiology in 1991 from Tulane University in New Orleans. Her research interests include melanoma, colorectal cancer, quality of cancer care, and health disparities.



Dr. Paul K. Mills, Ph.D., is a cancer epidemiologist with PHI assigned to the Cancer Registry of Central California in Fresno, California. He is also an adjunct associate professor at the University of California, San Francisco, Fresno Medical Education Program and a lecturer in the Department of Health Sciences at Fresno State University. Dr. Mills has been conducting research in the migrant and seasonal farm worker population of the San Joaquin Valley since 1995. He was a research epidemiologist at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health between 1993 and 1995, and was on the faculty at Loma Linda University between 1984 and 1993 where he conducted cancer studies in the Seventh-day Adventist population. He began his research career at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in the 80's. Dr. Mills earned his doctorate degree in epidemiology from the University of Texas Health Science Center and his Master's of Public Health from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health.



Lilia O'Connor, M.B.A., R.H.I.T., C.T.R., with an emphasis in accounting and management, is PHI's director of registry operations at CCR. With 10 regional areas reporting data to the central registry, O'Connor manages the largest cancer registry in the world. Prior to joining PHI in 2000, O'Connor was the director of registry operations for the Northern California Cancer Center and managed that Center's Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Results registry for 18 years. In addition to the registry, she has managed the conduct of research studies such as the quality of cancer care studies for the National Cancer Institute and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

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"We're changing the way people think about health..."

In Our Next Newsletter Edition:

International Health
Our next newsletter will focus on international health: leadership and sharing lessons learned.

Program Accomplishments

■ California Health Interview Survey

The California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) is the largest statewide consumer health survey ever conducted in the United States. You can learn more about the survey, and access the data for a number of geographic regions by one or two concurrent variables by visiting their website at www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/. An additional tool now available is AskCHIS, an interactive, online data query system which will help you select health topics and request immediate reports. AskCHIS also provides weighted percents with confidence intervals and related population estimates for more than 200 CHIS data elements. You can examine results for pre-defined geographic areas, for example, individual counties in most cases. PHI researchers

Sue Holtby, M.P.H. and Elaine Zahnd, Ph.D. participated with other partners. CHIS is a collaborative project of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, the California Department of Health Services, and the Public Health Institute. For more information, visit PHI Program Links at www.phi.org

■ Prevalence and Specifics of District-wide Beverage Contracts in California's Largest School Districts

The Public Health Institute issued the first analysis of soda contracts from California's 25 largest school districts and shed some light on marketing practices that increased student soda consumption, captured market share, and ultimately contributed to California's growing youth obesity epidemic. Offering the first examination of the prevalence of school soda contracts in this state, the report, commissioned by The California

Endowment and written by California Project LEAN, was released this spring. The report included a survey of California's largest public school districts, which comprise more than one-third of all California public school students. The release of the survey increased media, political and public attention to soft drink sales in public schools. The report contributed to the successful effort to ban carbonated soft drinks in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest school system. For a complete report, visit www.phi.org.

■ California Dietary Practices Survey

Cancer Prevention and Nutrition Section of California Department of Health Services has released a report in conjunction with 5 a Day Week this fall. The report, entitled "Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in California

Adults Ten-Year Highlights from the California Dietary Practices Survey 1989-1999," highlights the important trends in fruit and vegetable consumption in the past 10 years and summarizes the latest public health recommendations for making healthy choices. The survey was administered by the Public Health Institute. For a copy of the report, visit www.phi.org.

Recent Publication

- "The Status of Community Benefit in California — a Statewide Review of Exemplary Practices and Key Challenges" is a study that documents high-quality community health initiatives supported by nonprofit hospitals to address unmet health-related needs in local communities. To order, call PHI Communications office at 510.644.8200 or via email clee@phi.org.