

New on the Web:

The January issue of the *HSPH Web Digest*, a monthly compilation of articles, news releases, and information about new HSPH websites, can be found at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/digest>.

Around the School

News & Notices of the Harvard School of Public Health

January 23, 1998

Graduate Students Fight Hepatitis B in Boston

On February 7, Leslie Hsu, a master's student in the Department of Health and Social Behavior, and other Boston-area graduate students, will be at Boston's South Cove Community Health Center helping to stop the needless death of children from hepatitis B. There is no cure for those afflicted with this disease, but there is a safe and reliable vaccine to prevent its transmission. Screening tests to determine a whether a person has been exposed to hepatitis B, as well as vaccinations, will be available at no cost to people without health insurance, courtesy of donations by Merck and Co. and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

This is the first phase of a plan to combat this deadly disease. Those doing the fighting include co-directors Hsu and HMS student Michael Tran, along with more than twenty other volunteers from HSPH, HMS, and Tufts and Boston Universities. Together, these students

make up the HepB coalition: the Hepatitis B Education and Prevention Boston Initiative.

Hepatitis B, which causes liver failure and death, infects an estimated 250,000 Americans each year, killing nearly 5,000 annually. Like AIDS, the disease is spread by a virus, usually transmitted through bodily fluids. However, hepatitis B

Continued on page 3

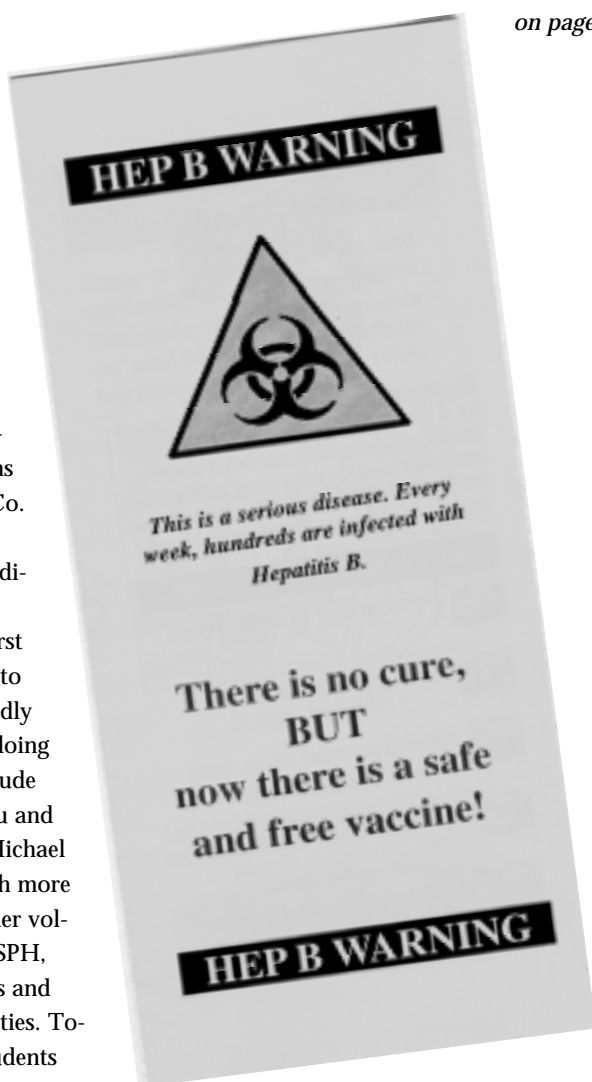
Women's Health Opportunities Increase at HSPH

Opportunities to learn about women's health have always been available at HSPH. Until recently, however, finding them could be a bit of a challenge: students had to read the course catalog thoroughly and seek advice from faculty members to discover what classes were offered through which department. Now, a group of faculty and students have made readily available a listing of women's health options at the school, and they plan to do a lot more in the future—including the proposed introduction of a new course focusing on gender and health for 1998-99.

The Women and Health Working Group was created by a number of faculty who all had experiences similar to those of Marlene Goldman, associate professor of epidemiology: "Each year, students from my course in reproductive epidemiology would come to my office and tell me that they were interested in learning more about women's health issues and ask me what other opportunities there were at the school. I'd refer them to Jane Gardner's course, 'Women, Health, and Development,' in the Department of Maternal and Child Health, and to a number of courses offered in the Department of Population and International Health. But it was frustrating for me, and disappointing to them, that there was no 'official' agenda or pro-

Continued on page 2

Left: The cover of the English-language version of the pamphlet that the HepB group is distributing in and around Boston's Chinatown.





The 1998 Winter Charity Ball, sponsored by the Student Coordinating Committee, will be held on January 31 from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m. at the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston. Tickets for the evening will be sold outside the Kresge cafeteria on January 26, 27, and 28 from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. Tickets prices are \$25 for students and \$35 for faculty and staff. Proceeds benefit Prevention Now!, an afterschool program for children in high-risk communities.



Above: Marlene Goldman, associate professor, Department of Epidemiology. Bottom Right: Jane Gardner, senior lecturer, Department of Maternal and Child Health. Goldman and Gardner are part of a group working to expand opportunities at HSPH for training and research in areas relating to gender and health.

Women's Health, cont'd. gram, that there was no possibility of concentrating in women's health, not even any place or person to serve as a clearinghouse for research and scholarship in this area at our school."

Gardner, a senior lecturer in the Department of Maternal and Child Health, decided that the situation would be improved if the faculty who were doing research or teaching courses in areas of women's health had occasion to meet and talk with each other about their work. She took the initiative to call together all of the faculty that she knew of who were working in this area, and asked each of those people to contact others. With interested students—especially members of Women in Public Health—also invited, the group held its first meeting in September, 1996.

"There were about ten of us at that first meeting," said Gardner. "We spent most of the time telling each other about our own research and teaching activities." Everyone agreed that forming a group was helpful in giving the members a more comprehensive understanding of women's health activities at the school. They were able to put together a list of fourteen courses, offered through five departments at the school, which fell under the rubric of "women and health."

Since then, the group has continued to meet once a month to lay the groundwork and begin building a framework for more formal study of gender and health at the school. They are particularly interested in fostering research and training that recognizes the influence of diversity and inequality on the health of women. What the finished structure will look like depends upon a number of variables, including faculty and student interest, funding, and administrative support, but what is certain are the advances made thus far: the group has printed a pamphlet listing the fourteen HSPH courses recommended by the group and distributed the pamphlet to all of this year's incoming students, and the availability of a recommended curriculum has been featured in both the *Official Register* and on the school's website.

Another step is the identification of women and health as a substantive area in the Family and Community Health concentration of the Master of Public Health program. "The MPH program was a natural place to start," said Goldman. "This is intended for health professionals—OB/GYNs or endocrinologists—who are going to be seeing primarily women patients. This gender-oriented training from a public health perspective should be a perfect fit with their career training."

Proposed for the next academic year will be a new course on gender and health, featuring the interdiscipli-

nary perspective that is the hallmark of the group. Under consideration is a draft syllabus created by Nancy Krieger, assistant professor in the Department of Health and Social Behavior, and Sofia Gruskin, instructor in the Department of Population and International Health.

"We'd like the next big step to be the creation of an interdepartmental master's degree program," said Gardner. "It's vital that it be an interdisciplinary program because the research important to women's health occurs throughout the school. This perspective brings together all the disciplines and creates a shared responsibility for the program, and enables the creation of a curriculum that's much stronger than one that could be developed within any single department.

"And it isn't just for the curriculum, but also to strengthen the research. There's a great need for more research in women's health, and we expect to be forging interdisciplinary contacts in order to make that research happen."

What research needs to be done? And why doesn't it simply happen under the auspices of the Department of Maternal and Child Health? Goldman explained: "When we're talking about 'women and health,'





The Asian Club invites everyone to a Lunar New Year celebration of the “Year of the Tiger” on January 27 from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. in the Kresge cafeteria. The festivities include a table decorating competition and Asian foods. For more information, contact Tim Niu at tniu@hohp.harvard.edu.

we’re not just talking about subject matter, but the orientation, the multiple ways that gender influences health. Not simply the diseases or disorders that occur in women, but how and why women and men might present with different symptoms for the same disorder.

“Take HIV, for example: under the original Centers for Disease Control and Prevention definition of AIDS, many women with the disease were misdiagnosed because they were presenting with symptoms like vaginal infection, rather than with the pneumocystis pneumonia that physicians were looking for. So, until the definition was broadened to include those symptoms, some women were not diagnosed as having an AIDS-related condition or included in AIDS statistics. Increasingly, we are learning that the male model of disease is not the only model.”

“The women’s health perspective is a different approach to epidemiology,” summarized Gardner. “It’s more complex than simply biology—it’s looking at problems and disorders through a different lens.”

The Working Group on Women and Health has already made it easier for students and faculty to learn about scholarship and research in this area at the school. Next year, through the new course and MPH concentration, they begin the expansion of such opportunities. Gardner, Goldman, and the rest of the working group are eager to discuss further steps in the study of women and health at HSPH. Interested faculty and students are invited to contact Gardner at 432-1080 or Goldman at 432-4586.

Hepatitis, cont’d.

is a hundred times more contagious than AIDS. Hepatitis B can be transmitted not only through unprotected sex, contact with blood or bodily fluids, and from mother to child at birth, but also from sharing gum or food, or from sharing personal items like toothbrushes and razors. For a variety of reasons, the disease is especially prevalent in populations from Southeast Asia, China, the Pacific Islands, and areas of Africa and South America.

The South Cove Community Health Center serves Boston’s Chinatown and neighboring communities—areas with large Chinese and Southeast Asian populations. Between 1990 and 1995, the average hepatitis B incidence in Boston for Asians was nearly 200 per 100,000 people, compared with rates of 28 for African-Americans and less than 7 for whites.

Hsu is intimately familiar with the tragedy underlying these statistics. While she was in college, planning on a medical career, her brother was diagnosed with liver cancer, caused by hepatitis B. A month after he died, Hsu’s mother was diagnosed with hepatitis B. She, too, became a victim of this preventable disease.

Researchers are working on a cure for hepatitis B, and some positive results have been achieved, yet prevention through vaccination and education are the safest and cheapest options for preventing suffering and death. It was precisely this thought that led Hsu to HSPH, rather than to medical school, following her college graduation. “I lost some of my faith in medicine,” said Hsu. “My experiences with hepatitis B showed me how much more effective prevention could be



than trying to treat somebody who is already ill. I chose to study in the Department of Health and Social Behavior because it allows me to focus on disease prevention and health promotion.”

Phase two of the HepB plan is to get all of the participants to return to the clinic for the second and third shots necessary for the vaccine to be effective. The second vaccination is given after a month, and the third after six months. “Some of the ways that previous vaccination efforts had failed was by not getting people to return for the follow-up vaccinations,” said Hsu. “We’re using incentives to get people to come back. Not just the promise of freedom from hepatitis B, but we’re also going to be giving away some things donated by the community. So far we’ve got donations from the Chinatown McDonald’s, Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream, Sir Speedy,

Leslie Hsu, co-director of the HepB Initiative: Hepatitis B Education and Prevention Boston.

Continued on page 4

Calendar

Submit calendar listings to Ethan Cohen, Kresge 1005, by noon on Monday of the week preceding the event. Listings may be transmitted via Email (ecohen@sph.harvard.edu).

The Countway Library of Medicine offers free classes in the use of its electronic resources. Instruction on using MEDLINE via Telnet will be given on January 28 at 11:00 a.m. and a demonstration of HOLLIS will be presented at 12:00 p.m. on January 30. Both classes take place in the Knowledge Lab on level L-1. Call 432-2134 to register.



Around the School can be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ats/>.

Monday, January 26

"Eat Well and Keep Moving: A Health Promotion Program in Urban Elementary Schools—Preliminary Results"

Speakers: Lilian Cheung, lecturer, Department of Nutrition; Steven Gortmaker, senior lecturer, Department of Health and Social Behavior
Sponsor: Department of Nutrition SPH II-202, 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Tuesday, January 27

"Implications of Murphy's Four-State Model on Smooth Muscle Contractile Dynamics"

Speaker: Srboľjub Mijailovich, research associate, Department of Environmental Health
Sponsor: Department of Environmental Health, Physiology Program SPH I-1301, 9:30-10:30a.m.

"Lung Collapse and Diving in Whales—Big Deal!"

Speaker: Richard Brown, Thord-Gray visiting scholar, University of Goteborg, Zoological Institute, Sweden
Sponsor: Department of Environmental Health, Physiology Program SPH I-1301, 10:30-11:30 a.m.

"Subspecialty Versus Generalist Care: Results of the ASK (Ambulatory Shoulder and Knee) Study"

Speaker: David Bates, medical director, Clinical and Quality Analysis, Partners in Health Care
Sponsor: Center for Quality of Care Research and Education Kresge G-2, 12:30-1:30 p.m.

Thursday, January 29

"The Health Status of Afghan Women Under the Taliban Rule"

Speaker: Zieba Shorish-Shamley, chair, Women's Alliance for Peace and Human Rights in Afghanistan
Sponsors: FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, Health and Human Rights Student Group, Women in Public Health, Minority Student Health Organization, Student Coordinating Committee
FXB-G12, 12:30-1:20 p.m.

"Incorporating Concerns for Equity in Economic Evaluations of Health Care Programs"

Speaker: Erik Nord, National Institute of Public Health, Norway
Sponsor: Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies
9 Bow Street, Cambridge, 4:30-6:00 p.m.

Friday, January 30

"Politics, Culture, and Family Planning in Indonesia"

Speaker: Terry Hull, Department of Demography, Australian National University, Canberra
Sponsor: Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies
9 Bow Street, Cambridge, 12:30-2:00 p.m.

Exams and Defenses

Matteo Bottai, doctoral student in the Department of Biostatistics, will present his thesis, "Likelihood-Based Asymptotic Inference when the Fisher Information is Zero," on January 28 at 10:00 a.m. in Kresge 606.

Hepatitis, cont'd.

Kinko's copying, and the Sony Cheri Theatre, and we're hoping to obtain the cooperation of other sponsors."

Another mechanism for assuring follow-up is HepB's Big Sibling program. This program began as a way of fostering relationships between the student volunteers and youths in the neighborhood with a goal of encouraging the kids to come back for all three vaccinations and helping the kids and their families fill out the proper paperwork to receive medical care.

In preparation for the February 7 screening and vaccinations, HepB volunteers have begun a mass media campaign including the distribution of pamphlets and posters and the staffing of a toll-free telephone hotline. Hsu eagerly stressed that HepB could use more help, either in the form of donations for incentives or as volunteers to help staff the clinics or the telephone hotline. A training session for volunteers is scheduled for January 31. Those interested should contact Hsu at lhsu@hsph.harvard.edu, or volunteer coordinator Cassandra Keleher at ckellehe@student.med.harvard.edu.

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