

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 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@hobp.harvard.edu.

3

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



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

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,

Continued on page 4

An orientation session for recently hired exempt staff will be held from 9:00 to 11:30 a.m. on January 27 in MEC-L008, 260 Longwood Avenue, HMS. The program includes an overview of Harvard's organizational structure and mission, benefits, retirement plans, facilities, programs, and services. Benefits Office consultants will be on hand to answer questions.

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