Happy Fall!

This is my favorite time of year with the start of a new school year, crisp mornings, and beautiful fall colors. After the slower pace of the summer things seem to liven up. I’d like to take this opportunity to catch you up on the progress of WisTREC.

The big news this year is that the University of Wisconsin - Madison Physician Assistant Program has begun its distance option. They have two enthusiastic students piloting the program (see inside for their stories). They are very appreciative of the opportunity to stay in their home communities and to be flexible with their class time. They are also helping to work out the kinks in the delivery of the content and interaction with peers and instructors. This year it’s not just the students that are learning a lot!

Besides the UW-Madison PA Program, we can offer a complete distance program for certified nurse midwifery students and for nurse practitioner students. Marquette University’s College of Nursing has all six of their CNM specialty courses online and, with the help of other WisTREC courses and the Jesuit Learning Network, they can make their CNM degree available to distance students. Concordia University of Wisconsin in Mequon has a distance program for NPs with six of their courses available online. UW-Eau Claire is also working on a distance program for NPs with at least one distance course offered each semester. UW-Madison is plugging away, having developed 3 distance courses for the core curriculum and 2 courses for their pediatric specialty, and 3 more planned this year. Brenda Kupsch, our instructional technology consultant, and Eileen Horn, working as our web developer, have been kept quite busy assisting faculty in their distance education efforts.

Our two community liaisons, Carol Pinkston in the north and Kiah Calmese in the south, have been busy working with current and potential students and getting to know the employer partners in their areas. We currently have 18 WisTREC students and 8 graduates, with 6 potential students that are actively working on being admitted to their programs of choice. Carol and Kiah keep tabs on them and help to solve financial, logistical, and motivational challenges. For example, Carol was able to broker support from Northern AHEC for our two pilot PA students to get DSL lines for Internet service for a year.

The Utilization Committee has revised and produced the 2nd edition of the Employment Guide. With the help of American Family Insurance and Wisconsin AHEC System, we have printed guides for new notebooks and copies to insert into existing notebooks. We have sent out the replacement inserts, so if you haven’t received yours let Eileen know (608-262-8755);

We are in the fifth year of our six-year grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Both UW Madison PA Program and the NP programs at UW-Madison and UW-Eau Claire have been successful in obtaining large federal grants to assist in the continued development of distance programs. With RWJ monies and the federal grants, the distance programs will be completed before the current grant money expires. However, with the ending of the RWJ grant it is not only a time of reflection but a time for vision. To this end we have developed a survey with a list of existing and potential services and roles that WisTREC could provide as we continue on our overall mission of increasing access to health care by increasing the number of primary care providers working in underserved populations. If you would like to help determine the future direction of WisTREC, you may fill out our survey at:
http://www.son.wisc.edu/~son/resources/survey.html

We’ve done good things together in the past three years. Thanks to everyone for their hard work and support. Here’s to the future!
Our Distance PA Learners

Paula Havisto and Anne Rhody are Wisconsin’s first two physician assistant students to obtain their professional education predominantly via the personal computer. Havisto, of Woodruff, and Rhody, of Fall River, are enrolled in the Physician Assistant Program at UW-Madison.

Havisto, who currently works 30 hours a week as a registered dietitian for the Great Lakes Intertribal Council in Lac du Flambeau, chose the distance option enthusiastically. Married with three school-age children, she didn’t want to move or commute the long distance to Madison to pursue her PA degree. Instead, she can schedule her time flexibly to listen to lectures, which she receives in video format through the computer in her study. She works with two PA mentors in her community, who are available to answer questions and allow her to observe their work in the clinic and in the emergency room. The local hospital lets her use its medical library whenever she needs it. Havisto’s long-term goal is to work at an Indian health clinic.

Rhody, a mother and former international marketing manager, has found the distance option a perfect fit for her schedule, family responsibilities, and learning style.

“I was worried it would feel like I was going to school in a cave, with no contact outside my house, and I was worried I’d feel invisible to the rest of the class,” she explains. “But with the mentoring side of the program, I actually feel as if I have a leg up over the other students. I can go have direct contact with patients at any point, in a clinic close to my home. I get up when my nine-month-old daughter wakes up; I log on and ‘go to class’ when she naps. Later at night, when my husband and the kids are in bed, I spent a little more time finishing up. I’m worried that I’m getting spoiled, doing things at my own pace, in my own time!”

Distance Education Conference

The week of August 8-10 brought many people from around the world to Madison for the 17th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning. Because the UW-Madison Physician Assistant Program is developing a distance education option designed to extend PA education into medically underserved areas, WisTREC provided funding for faculty and staff to attend. Forrest Girdley, Peg Volkmann, Honorie Coté, Perri Morgan, Don Hushieere and Mara Trionfero attended a variety of workshops clustered within the categories of; Case Studies, Course Development, Learning Environments, Faculty Development, Innovative Applications, Instructional Design, Learners & Learning Support, Evaluation & Research, Planning & Management, Teaching Methods, and Media Center/Emerging Technologies.

Faculty pursued diverse interests in choosing their sessions. Forrest Girdley found the session on writing for the web to be very enlightening, and Peg Volkmann felt that the sessions on evaluation and student services were very helpful. Because the entire faculty is interested in the challenges of promoting discussion online, several people attended Vanessa Dennen’s presentation on the Art and Science of Developing an Asynchronous Discussion Topic. Professor Dennen presented practical suggestions and shared specific techniques from her experience as an instructor and her Ph.D research. Perri Morgan is enthusiastic about introducing this learning method into the Clinical Medicine course during the fall semester.

Staff Profile

Southern Wisconsin Community Liaison Kiah Calmese Walker joined the WisTREC family in December of 2000. Though originally from Los Angeles, California, she comes to us from Long Island, New York, where she, her husband Brett, and their children (pet ferrets Pharyss and Phoebe) lived for 2 years. Kiah’s background is rooted within the realm of human service provision via her experience in student affairs as a client-centered counselor and advisor. During her service as a Residence Hall Director (RHD), at both St. Olaf College and the State University of New York at Stony Brook, she played a vital role in the mental, emotional and academic development of young (and mature) adult students from all cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Having received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology and Anthropology from Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, Kiah hopes to further pursue a career in medicine as a Pediatric Obstetrician (specializing in adolescent pregnancy), working primarily in medically underserved communities. For this reason, she declares, “The community liaison position seemed ideal for me, considering that I view myself as the perfect aspiring WisTREC student... one who has dreams and goals of pursuing a health care career serving within socio-economically impoverished communities, in the midst of having a life, a current career, and a family.”

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submitted by Mara Trionfero & Peg Volkmann
UW Madison Physician Assistant Program
Community Liaisons Coordinate
Wisconsin Express Sites

The Wisconsin Express is an annual program of the statewide Area Health Education Center (AHEC) system that gives health professions students a chance to learn about underserved communities throughout the state by immersion in the various sites’ cultures and visits with local health care providers. An added benefit to students is that they get to meet health care students from professions other than their own. This year our two WisTREC Community Liaisons, Carol Pinkston in the north and Kiah Calmese in the south, helped with the Wisconsin Express, which was held May 21-24, 2001. The week began with an interactive Cultural Diversity workshop in Madison for all Express students and site coordinators. Then, it was on to their immersion experiences in their respective communities.

Carol Pinkston, PhD, Northern Community Liaison for WisTREC, coordinated a Hmong site in the Wausau Area. The Wausau Area Hmong Association hosted five students: three students who have just completed their first year of medical school at UW-Madison, one student who is entering her fourth year of college in pre-med at UW-Green Bay, and one Collaborative Nursing Program (CNP) student nearing completion of her BSN and currently an RN at Wausau Hospital.

The host coordinator, MeLee Thao, RN, Northern AHEC Board member and potential WisTREC student, served as the Host Site Coordinator. Northern AHEC Executive Director, Suzanne Matthew, PhD, and the Express students had an opportunity to talk with the Hmong Youth Association about health career possibilities and to show them Northern AHEC’s Health Careers website. Carol also shared information relating to WisTREC with the Hmong students and with her two undergraduate Wisconsin Express students. The Express experience has helped WisTREC make inroads into the Hmong community in Wausau.

All of the Wausau students were enthusiastic about the Wisconsin Express. The most important thing the students learned was that what seems to be going on with Hmong patients may not be what is actually happening. Express students now have a better understanding about Hmong patients, including those patients who still speak no English. They learned that they have to be patient with people from a different culture and that they need to ask when in doubt. They also developed a deeper understanding of the importance of the family and the clan in Hmong culture. Four of the students who participated expressed their intentions of practicing in underserved communities: one in the inner city and three in rural Wisconsin.

WisTREC’s Southern Community Liaison, Kiah Calmese Walker, escorted five UW Madison healthcare students to Beloit, for the week-long experience. The students (Laura Liebetrat, Jessica Vorpahl, Betty Telvick, and Kristen Lofgren) were welcomed into the Beloit Area Community Health Center (BACHC) with open arms by the Medical Director, Jonas Lee, and his staff. Throughout the week, the students shadowed health practitioners (2 physicians, 2 nurse practitioners, 4 RNs, 3 LPNs, and a host of support staff) as they screened, treated, and cared for members of the southern Beloit community.

In addition to their shadowing experiences, the students met with and visited different community organization directors that frequently collaborate with the BACHC in servicing the community (i.e. Beloit Health Department, Beloit Inner City Council, Beloit HUB Center, UW Extension, Merrill Community Center, and EvenStart program). Recent Physical Therapy program graduate, Kristen Lofgren, expressed that she “never knew community healthcare efforts existed, such as those in Beloit. We rarely ever get a chance to see this side of healthcare!” It was a great experience for all involved and the students left with more of a complete perspective on “client-centered, community healthcare” that truly concentrates on every aspect of the individual, and not just their physical condition.

All WisTREC programs and students might want to keep in mind that all healthcare students are eligible to participate in the Wisconsin Express. For more information about the Express, see Northern AHEC’S website: http://www.nahec-wi.org/.
Calendar of Events

November

11/8  Steering Committee, 10:00-12:00 Audio conference

11/9  Utilization Committee, 10:00-12:00, School of Nursing

December

12/4  Community Connections Committee, 10:00-12:00, Location TBA

12/7  Education Planning Committee, 9:00-11:00 Audio conference

12/11 Recruitment, Admission and Retention Committee, 9:00-11:00, Audio conference

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