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A recent study showed that about 42% of households surveyed had a complete disaster kit with a three-day supply of water and nonperishable food, a battery-operated working radio and a battery-operated flashlight. A woman uses her cellphone to take pictures of a damaged home after a tornado that touched down in December in Oregon. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)

Less healthy? Less likely to prepare for disaster

By Eryn Brown
10:16 AM PST, January 12, 2011

Chances are, your family hasn't been 100% on the ball when it comes to keeping a disaster kit -- the several days' supply of water, food, matches, medications, blankets, batteries and other supplies you might need in an emergency -- on hand.

And the chances are even greater that you're unprepared if you're disabled or if you have a chronic disease, a study in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine reported Tuesday.

Researchers led by Jeffrey Bethel, a professor of public health at East Carolina University in Greenville, N.C., analyzed data gathered from 37,303 respondents in Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada and Tennessee as part of the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, a nationwide survey conducted by state health departments between 2006 and 2008.

Among these survey participants, about 42% of households -- less than half -- said they had a complete disaster kit consisting of a three-day supply of water and nonperishable food, a battery-operated working radio and a battery-operated flashlight. About 29% said they had an emergency evacuation plan, and about 87% reported that each family
member requiring medication had a three-day supply on hand.

Those reporting poor health, disabilities or chronic disease were less likely than healthier people to have a full disaster kit, and more likely to say they had medications on hand. Generally, less healthy people were also less likely to have an evacuation plan -- though those who use special equipment such as a wheelchair were more likely to have an evacuation plan.

While the numbers of people with a three-day supply of medication were somewhat encouraging (the American Red Cross recommends keeping a seven-day supply), the overall lack of preparation is troubling, the researchers said.

People with health problems -- there are about 47.5 million Americans with a disability and 133 million with at least one chronic disease -- are more likely to suffer during natural disasters like hurricanes, floods or earthquakes. It's harder for less-healthy people to respond to a crisis or evacuate. What's more, their disabilities could be aggravated by post-disaster conditions. The study cited a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that said five of the top six conditions affecting Hurricane Katrina evacuees were chronic diseases.

The researchers suggested that public health officials should use this information to better target people with poor health -- and try to figure out why so few people take the simple steps needed to be prepared. "Future studies should investigate why vulnerable groups do not have complete disaster preparedness kits, particularly in areas prone to fires, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes and flooding," they wrote.

The finding were similar to those of a previous study conducted in Los Angeles County.

RELATED: Los Angeles Times reports on earthquake preparedness.
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Enrollment at Pitt Community College jumped again for the spring semester, continuing a double-digit climb that began with the 2010 fall semester.

When open enrollment ended Tuesday, the campus had registered 8,146 students, 817 more than last spring's 7,329 students. The 11 percent increase comes close to matching the previous fall semester's 11.9 percent increase.

“That represented the first time we ever broke 8,000 in our enrollment,” Joanne Ceres, PCC's director of enrollment management and registrar, said.

PCC's president, Dennis Massey, said the school was prepared. “We anticipated an increase because we had a big increase in the fall,” he said Wednesday. “It's certainly accelerating in the last two to three years with the economy the way it is.”

Massey said the school was financially able to add class sections, comprising about a 10 percent increase in student spaces either in traditional classrooms or online classes, to address the demand. When hiring is complete, PCC expects to have added 15 full-time faculty members and about 100 part-time instructors since August, said Dan Mayo, assistant vice-president for academic affairs.

PCC was able to increase its capacity and hire more instructors, Massey said.
“Because we had a big increase last year and we had the enrollment growth funding for that to add to our base, we were able to allocate funds for additional sections this year,” he said.

Massey added that PCC's ability to continue this strategy depends on whether the General Assembly maintains funding levels.

“Space is always a challenge here with the fact that we continue to be the most crowded of all the community colleges in the state,” he said. “We're seeing growth across the board in almost all of our programs.”

Ceres said that more students will be added this spring in different programs.

“The high schools are still registering some students,” she said. “We also have an agreement with East Carolina University for their (developmental) math students, which will be added to our total as well.”

The campus is trying to accommodate student growth in a variety of ways. “We're teaching earlier and later,” Ceres said.

There also has been an increase in online offerings to serve students. The first of two weekend college programs for the spring is another program to see its enrollment spike, Ceres said.

She said that the economy didn't just swell enrollment. “Right now, 52 percent of the currently enrolled students are receiving a Pell grant,” she said. “That compares with a little over 36 percent of that population in the spring of 2010.”

PCC is growing its campus to meet demand with funding from a quarter-cent sales tax.

Last month, officials held a ground-breaking ceremony at the site of the $9.34 million Charles E. Russell building, scheduled to be completed in 2012.

The 52,000-square-foot building will contain classrooms to help ease the space crunch.

Two other construction projects are under way. This year, a 28,000-square-foot Facility Services Complex at a cost of $4.18 million is expected to be finished. Phase one of the 58,000-square-foot Construction and Industrial Technology Center with a $8.45 million price tag is expected to be completed in 2012.

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ECU baseball coach Billy Godwin talks about Chase McDonald, a 6-foot-4, 270 pound J.H. Rose graduate that is a member of the Pirates’ freshman recruiting class. (Rhett Butler/The Daily Reflector)

Pirates striving for Omaha
By Nathan Summers
The Daily Reflector
Thursday, January 13, 2011

Plenty of things will be different when the 2011 college baseball season begins in February.

Most notably for East Carolina, some rookie infielders will be on the scene to help erase painful memories of a team which committed 108 errors last season. At the plate, ECU hitters, including a promising freshman from Greenville, will join the rest of the nation in trying to master a new bat that is much more like the wooden bats used in all professional leagues.

But for all that's new, two of the main things on ECU coach Billy Godwin's mind this preseason are things that haven't changed, and things that are cornerstones for all college baseball teams.

For one, Godwin's entire starting pitching rotation is back and loaded with experience. The other thing left unchanged, as reiterated on Wednesday afternoon by Godwin as he spoke at the Greater Greenville Sports Club's monthly luncheon, is a commitment to taking the Pirates to the College World Series for the first time.

“We strive every day to play in Omaha,” said Godwin, whose club (32-27 last season) will swing into action Feb. 18 against Youngstown State in a three-game weekend set at Clark-LeClair Stadium.

Godwin repeatedly stopped himself just short of predicting big things for his team this year, a good sign that the sixth-year coach likes what he has seen so far through fall ball and offseason training.
“We brought back every pitcher on our staff from last year's team,” Godwin told a crowded room at the Hilton Greenville. “It's very rare that a college program can say that. We still have two guys on our staff that two years ago started a Super Regional game for us (in Chapel Hill) in Seth Maness and Kevin Brandt, and our closer off that team (Brad Mincey).”

In all, the Pirates kept 12 pitchers from last season and lost only three. Also back in the fold are outfielders Trent Whitehead, infielders Corey Thompson and John Wooten, along with hard-hitting catcher Zach Wright.

Pencilled as the new starter at designated hitter is hulking J.H. Rose product Chase McDonald, who is listed at 6-foot-4, 270 pounds.

“I call him Moose,” Godwin said of McDonald, the primary replacement for slugger Kyle Roller. “If you look at him, you think, ‘How in the heck?’ He looks like he should be a pulling guard for the football team. It doesn't look like he could swing.

“I don't like to anoint a lot of our freshmen before they do it, but I think when you're around Chase and see the things he brings to the table physically — the power and the ability to hit — he's a good baseball player.”

Godwin got some laughs from the crowd — expected ones or not — when he also noted the arrival of four new shortstops to the Pirates, including promising junior college finds Tim Younger (St. Petersburg Community College) and Michael Ussery (Ohlone). Last season, a handful of players tried unsuccessfully to replace Dustin Harrington after he was kicked off the team.

“I can tell a lot of you saw us play last year,” Godwin said in response to the laughter following his shortstop announcement. “We did address our infield issue that we had. I think you'll be pleased to see that.

“That was tough to watch,” Godwin said of his team's porous defense, “but we got through it and we're going to be better because of it.”

If Godwin's prediction is correct about the NCAA's new bat rules, the Pirates might face the rare problem of not having as much of the home run power they've relied on heavily in the past.

The new Ball-Bat Coefficient of Restitution standard, simply put, is designed to make college baseball's aluminum bats more like wood.

While he'll no longer have to worry about some of his opponents' gift home runs that are sometimes more the product of the bat than the player holding it, Godwin expects a noticeable drop in power.
“Two years ago, we had 110 home runs with the Super Regional team,” Godwin said. “I think with this bat and that same team, it would be about 60. It doesn't mean the game's not going to be as exciting. I think it's going to be a purer sense of baseball.”

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Colleges hope to hire back retirees

BY ERIC FERRERI - Staff Writer

CHAPEL HILL Strapped for cash and short on staff, the UNC system wants the state to lessen the six-month period that retired state employees must wait before going back to work for North Carolina.

If the state scaled that waiting period back to one month, as the UNC system wants, faculty and staff members could draw retirement pay while providing expertise in classrooms and elsewhere that, in an era of budget cuts, may otherwise be lacking, officials say.

UNC-system leaders will discuss the issue this week and might make it a formal part of the system's 2011-13 legislative policy agenda - essentially, a priority list of needs to lobby for.

For university leaders, the use of newly retired professors - generally on a short-term, part-time basis - is a cheap way to fill teaching slots with experienced instructors. The six-month waiting period is, in many cases, too long to wait, said Laurie Charest, interim vice president for human resources with the UNC system.

"Retirees are the most valuable and most needed immediately after they retire," Charest said. "We're getting a knowledgeable person to do a job, generally at a low rate of pay."

In some states, versions of this practice, known as "double-dipping," have been frowned upon because retired employees - often highly paid administrators - draw pension payments while going right back to their old jobs and salaries.

In North Carolina, there are safeguards against this, Charest said.

Now, the state mandates that all employees who retire wait six months before working again for any state agency. Retirees can return only to part-
time service, usually for a set period guaranteed by contract. A worker can earn only up to half of the annual salary he or she was receiving at the time of retirement. Such workers don't receive health benefits.

"It's not a money-maker," said Sandie Gravett, a religious studies professor at Appalachian State University who leads the UNC system's Faculty Assembly, which represents the state's public university professors. "It really just helps us with our staffing needs."

The economic woes may have deterred some faculty from retiring. A UNC-system phased retirement program for tenured faculty has grown less popular in recent years, probably because the value of the retirement accounts held by longtime faculty have dropped. Participation in the program, which allows professors to ease out of their jobs by working part time for a few years, peaked in 2006, when 232 professors across the system took part. Since then, the number has dropped to 151.

Those numbers also were likely influenced by a 2007 state policy change upping the "normal" retirement age from 50 to 62, making far fewer faculty members eligible.

As budget constraints make hiring more difficult, universities often turn to retiring faculty and administrators to help plug holes, Gravett said.

Administrators desperate for cost savings are happy to get a hefty salary and benefits off the payroll while filling a teaching slot with the returning retiree. And many retired faculty members embrace the chance to return to campus on a limited basis.

"You won't be teaching a whole load, and you won't have research responsibilities," Gravett said. "But your expertise can be tapped into quickly at a time when we need all hands on deck."

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UNC team uses tiny particles to mimic blood

BY SARAH AVERY - Staff Writer

The quest to develop synthetic blood is advancing through the work of UNC-Chapel Hill researchers using tiny particles that are not only the same shape, but same flexibility as vital red blood cells.

The team, led by chemistry professor Joseph DeSimone, who invented a technology to mass produce uniquely shaped nanoparticles, builds on the observation that red blood cells are more pliant when they're in the youth of their 120-day life cycle.

New, supple red blood cells are able to squeeze through tiny pores and carry oxygen throughout the body. So by mimicking their shape and flexibility, DeSimone hopes to infuse his man-made microdots with oxygen-carrying hemoglobin to create a synthetic lifeline.

"Mechanics are important, and now we have a vehicle that has the same mechanics as red blood cells when young, and that's the first big step," DeSimone said. The research, which is being tested in mice, was reported this week in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Developing synthetic blood has long been the pursuit of scientists searching for an abundant and versatile alternative to use in traumas and battlefields. Whole blood has a limited shelf life, needs refrigeration and must be matched to the recipient.

But efforts to develop viable alternatives have been fraught with pitfalls. The artificial product PolyHeme was tested several years ago, including a brief time in the trauma center at Duke University Medical Center. But it and similar treatments drew controversy over patient consent and safety.

In 2008, a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that PolyHeme and four other synthetic blood products put patients at higher risk of death and heart attacks.
The approach taken by DeSimone and his colleagues is different. It capitalizes on the potential of nanoparticles, which are microscopic vehicles that he and other scientists hope can deliver therapies, scavenge harmful particles such as cholesterol or even serve as surrogates for cells in the body.

"Most people have been going smaller to increase the circulation time," of nanoparticles filled with hemoglobin for synthetic blood, DeSimone said. But he said the secret to the success of red blood cells is their ability to squish and squirt through minute portals.

Recreating that quality, he said, could produce a particle that encases the hemoglobin to safely deliver oxygen.

"We're able to do it in a synthetic carrier," he said.

DeSimone said additional research is funded with grants from the National Institutes of Health and the state's cancer research fund.

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