Diabetes is a local, national epidemic

By Michael Abramowitz  
The Daily Reflector

Monday, July 20, 2009

Diabetes is a local, national and worldwide epidemic getting worse each year, said experts in the field at Saturday's eighth annual Winning With Diabetes Conference at the East Carolina Heart Institute.

The prevalence of the disease is higher in North Carolina than the national trend, especially in children, said Robert Tanenberg, M.D., professor of medicine at the Brody School of Medicine and director of the Diabetes and Obesity Center at East Carolina University.

"I've been working in the diabetes field for 36 years," Tanenberg said. "We never saw very much adult onset diabetes in children. Now it's rampant in children and getting worse."

Saturday's educational conference invited people with diabetes in eastern North Carolina to empower themselves to make positive changes in their lives, said Cathy McLean, a clinical professor at the East Carolina University School of Nursing, who chaired the planning committee for the event.

Twenty-four million Americans have diabetes and 50 million more have a prevalence to contract the disease, McLean said.

"What's feeding this global epidemic is a combination of genetics, increasing obesity, a westernized diet high in sugar, salt and carbohydrates and a lack of physical activity," Tanenberg said.

The national epidemic is driven by bureaucratic inability to help people with education, health care and simple lifestyle changes, the diabetes specialist said.

The focus of public health care must change from treating patients who have diabetes to prevention, Tanenberg said.

"Identifying high-risk people early and preventing the onset of disease is our best chance to stop this epidemic," Tanenberg said. "Otherwise we're just treating people one at a time."

There are two main types of diabetes, according to the experts at the conference. Ninety to ninety-five percent of diabetics have Type II, also known as adult-onset diabetes. It is recognized by the inability of the body to utilize insulin, which is manufactured in the pancreas, through normal body metabolism.

Type I diabetes, found in the rest of the diabetic population, is the result of an inability of the pancreas to manufacture insulin.

Tanenberg said one out of three children born after 2000 will develop diabetes.

"By the time people come to me in middle age, it's much harder to treat," he said. "We have to change our kids' behavior, getting them more physically active and eating the right foods. We can't just use drugs and do gastric bypass on everybody."

The likelihood to have diabetes starts even before a baby is born, Tanenberg said.

If a mother has poor prenatal care, that baby will be more prone to diabetes. An obese mother will also be more
likely to have a baby that develops factors for diabetes, he said.

The 29-county region of eastern North Carolina presents challenges of access to health care and information on how to prevent and control diabetes, McLean said.

Obesity is a high risk factor for the disease because of the way it affects the body's metabolism.

"Chronic diseases take a lot of energy to manage, but there are serious long-term complications if diabetes isn't managed well," McLean said.

The conference provided widespread education aimed specifically toward those people who have diabetes and their families, so they can make the positive changes necessary to manage the disease, she said.

In this part of North Carolina, the increase in diabetes has to do with socio-economic conditions, Tanenberg said.

"People in rural parts of the state have less money, so they don't get the fruits and vegetables they need," he said. "They tend to eat cheap foods that are high in cholesterol, sugar and carbohydrates and more difficult to metabolize. There's also a southern tradition of eating foods that are not healthy."

Lifestyle and poverty are important contributors to the diabetes epidemic, Tanenberg said.

"People worked on farms years ago and were physically active," he said. "People are much less active now. Poor people also don't get the medical care they need."

Genetics are also an important factor, the experts said. Minorities, including African-Americans, Latinos and Native Americans have higher incidences of diabetes. Combined with much higher food consumption than ever and the resulting obesity, these groups are much more prone to get diabetes.

The conference gave visitors an opportunity to have their blood cholesterol levels checked, along with eye, foot and kidney exams. Displays set up by companies specializing in diabetes care allowed participants to see and learn about the latest products on the market.

Contact Michael Abramowitz at mabramowitz@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9571.
Rx: more docs

A shortage of primary care doctors is bad news for U.S. health care. Treatment at that level can be more cost-effective.

Diabetes often is first discovered as part of a routine checkup. The same is true with heart irregularities, cancer and many other illnesses. A family practice doctor (or primary care doc, or internal medicine specialist) might see what you thought was a little spot on your shoulder and recognize it as skin cancer. How many people, on how many millions of occasions, have told stories of being saved from serious illness or worse because a good general practitioner had a hunch?

Yet these highly respected, often-heroic practitioners have become harder to find. The truth is, a primary care practice often comes with long and unpredictable hours and much lower pay than that of specialists. Thus, the family doctor is often a person with an almost religious "calling" to enter the field. One from Elizabethtown told The News & Observer's Sarah Avery: "I wanted to make a difference in my patients' lives, and I still do." But it's harder for him because he can't find enough partners with an inclination to go into general practice, where knowledge both broad and deep is needed.

This isn't to say that specialists aren't just as committed to helping people. And yes, they have to do years of extra training. But some who incline toward general medicine believe their field is undervalued. Dr. Conrad Flick, a family medicine specialist and Duke University alumnus, said general practice physicians have to know a lot of diagnostic information and help people treat illnesses major and minor, but he says young doctors are encouraged to specialize in fields where they can make several times the money that family medicine might bring. (It's also true that many medical school graduates have debts to pay.)

President Obama's health care reform proposals, and virtually all reform ideas for that matter, rely on having enough primary care doctors to serve on that front line of medicine, to practice preventative care. The idea is to reduce the need for higher-priced care later on, thus holding down costs and insurance expense. Yes, it's just one aspect of reform, but the perennial shortage of primary care physicians is a great big bump in the road.

The same is true when it comes to people of all income levels simply finding a doctor. Rural communities in this state have a serious shortfall, but even in larger cities there can be a problem, especially for the uninsured or underinsured and the elderly. North Carolina's shortage is greater, per capita, than the nation's as a whole.

There are medical schools focused on training family doctors -- East Carolina University's is well-known in that regard -- and that's good. There are programs to encourage young doctors to practice in less populous areas, and that's good. But there must be more such programs, and more state and federal incentives for them.

The practice of medicine at the level of primary care must be treated, so to speak, with the same degree of respect by medical schools and patients alike. The "call" to family medicine or other varieties of front-line, primary care needs to be answered by more people, not
simply because it is an admirable personal choice but because it is itself such a valuable specialty.

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Franklin D. Jones

Franklin Douglas Jones, MD, age 58, passed on peacefully on Wednesday, July 15, 2009 at his home in Greenville, surrounded by his family. A celebration of his life will be held Sunday at 2 p.m. at Oakmont Baptist Church, on Red Banks Road. The service will be officiated by the Rev. Dr. Gregory Rogers. The cremated remains will be laid to rest by the family at a later date.

Dr. Jones was born October 6, 1950, in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., to the late Franklin Jones and Elizabeth Cole Jones. His father worked for CARE and the U.S. Department of State, which allowed Dr. Jones to enjoy living most of his childhood overseas in Panama, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, Thailand, and Spain.

Dr. Jones was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. He earned his medical degree from Eastern Virginia Medical School in Norfolk, Va. He completed his neurosurgical residency at the University of North Carolina Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill where he continued as an Assistant Professor. In 1985, he relocated to Greenville where he joined Eastern Neurosurgical and Spine Associates and served as Clinical Associate Professor at the East Carolina University School of Medicine. In 1993, he became Chief of the Division of Neurosurgery in the Department of Surgery and Clinical Professor at East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine.

Dr. Jones was a member of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons, the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, and served as president of the North Carolina Neurosurgical Society for two years. He was also a Diplomat of the American Board of Neurological Surgery, and in 2008, he served as a guest examiner for the American Board of Neurological Surgery. Other associations that Dr. Jones held memberships in included: The Foundation of International Education and Neurological Surgery, the Pitt County Medical Society, the Southern Neurosurgical Society, and the Seaboard Medical Society. His certifications included: the National Board of Medical Examiners, the American Board of Neurological Surgery, Gamma Knife Radiosurgery, Kyphoplasty Surgery, and X Stop Training.

Dr. Jones was also a contributor to various medical journals through numerous publications. Other committees included: Member of the Board of Directors of the Ronald McDonald House, Executive Committee Member of the Leo Jenkins Cancer Center, Medical Executive Committee of the Department of Surgery, and the Neuroscience Conference Co-Director.

A lover of life, knowledge, travel, and adventure, he found great joy in sharing time with his family, friends and colleagues. He was devoted to his patients and felt truly honored to be a neurosurgeon. While he loved all sports (especially UNC basketball!), he especially enjoyed playing tennis, scuba diving, and skiing. One of his greatest pleasures was playing on the Baywood Racket Club Tennis Team, which he co-captained with his son, David. He felt most at peace while enjoying long hours on the beach with his family, friends and his dogs, Holly and Bhoghi.

Dr. Jones was preceded in death by his parents. He is survived by his wife, Brenda Jones of the home; his daughter Kristin who currently resides in Miami, Fla.; and son David of Greenville; his sister, Barbara Bowman and husband, Tom, of Richmond, Va., and their three children Michael, Kelly, and Doug; his mother-in-law, Elizabeth Barr of Lancaster, S.C.; his sister-in-law, Sarah Adams and husband, Richard, of High Point, and their children Ashley Clinard and husband Matthew, and Katherine Howard and husband Jason.

Franklin Douglas Jones will be truly missed by all who knew and loved him. The family would like to thank everyone who so graciously offered prayers and support.

Visitation will be held tonight from 6 to 8 at Wilkerson Funeral Home.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to Leo Jenkins Cancer Center, Brody School of Medicine at ECU, 525 Moye Blvd., Greenville, NC 27834 or University Health Systems Home Health and Hospice P.O. Box 6028, Greenville, NC 27835-9978.

The family would like to give special thanks to Dr. Paul Walker and the staff at Leo Jenkins Cancer Center, Dr. Michael Tripp of Eastern Radiology, and Lisa Tucci, RN, of UHS Hospice Care.

Laurels — To the elimination of 30 mobile units from 14 Pitt County public schools, the first phase of a process that will reduce the number of those temporary classroom facilities by 135. These units are being demolished and auctioned, and the next phases will see construction and reassignment place more students into permanent classrooms, eliminating the need for students to brave the elements.

Moving day

Laurels — To the relocation of the East Carolina Village of Yesteryear, a move that has been in the works for several years. Several of the building made the cross-town trip last weekend, with trucks transporting them from the Pitt County Fairgrounds to a new location on County Home Road. The preservation of this historical resource is welcome news.

Laurels — To the estimated $50 million in refunds to be delivered to about 1 million auto insurance policyholders in North Carolina, the result of an agreement reached by Insurance Commissioner Wayne Goodwin and the N.C. Rate Bureau. It may be a common course in this state, but still welcome in this troublesome economy.

Darts — To a summer shortage of blood at the Red Cross that has officials concerned and in need of donors as soon as possible. Half of the eight types of blood are at low levels in Pitt County, and further diminished stocks could trigger a blood emergency. Those capable of donating are urged to contact the Red Cross for more information.

Laurels — To a full, open and honest discussion needed about health care in America. As Washington debates a massive reform, it is important that citizens stay informed of its progress and make sure they conduct adequate research to determine its facts. This issue is too important to be derailed by misinformation or fear-mongering.

Darts — To Pitt County gas prices that seem to hover above those of surrounding communities. Local residents who visit places as close as Tarboro, Rocky Mount, Kinston and New Bern marvel at how those towns enjoy per gallon costs several cents lower than those locally. All can be thankful that gas prices continue a steady decline at least.

Laurels — To the start of the United Way of Pitt County's annual Pacesetters Campaign, the launching point for the chapter's fund-raising drive. A kick-off event on Thursday outline the importance of the campaign and its value to the organizations that help county residents and depend on the United Way for funding. The generosity of this community routinely impresses, and there is little doubt that quality will shine once again.

Compiled by Brian Colligan, editorial page editor of The Daily Reflector. Contact him at 329-9507 or via e-mail at bcolligan@coxnc.com
East Carolina gives residence halls summer makeover

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Friday, July 17, 2009

East Carolina University students returning this fall will be welcomed by new conveniences and safety measures on campus.

Officials have been making improvements to residence halls this summer while most of the campus has been inactive.

Each residence hall has been fitted with electronic access control systems on the exterior doors. Students will now use an electronic fob, similar to an ID badge, to gain access to dorm buildings.

Aaron Lucier, associate director of campus living at ECU, said the upgrade will enhance security systems in the residence halls.

"All the residence halls have been locked 24 hours a day," Lucier said. "We are not changing the fact that they are locked 24 hours every day but this allows us to do tracking information of when the door has been used and not used."

Officials also will be able to quickly deactivate lost or stolen keys.

The system also can lock down halls to protect residents in emergency situations.

Scott Hall on College Hill is undergoing a full renovation that is slated to be completed in the fall of 2010. It has been gutted and will be fitted with new interior walls, doors, tile floors, bathroom fixtures, paint, carpet, windows, furniture and plumbing, and mechanical and electrical systems. The building’s exterior also will be extensively renovated.

Room configurations in the building will change to increase capacity, and the building will be the largest residence hall on campus when it re-opens, Lucier said.

New four-story towers are to be built adjacent to each suite, and a four-story addition with 17 four-room suites, two public group bathrooms and a large mechanical space on the ground level will be built in the courtyard area.

Scott Hall will essentially be a new building, though the foundation will remain, Lucier said.

Jones Hall and Aycock Hall are being fitted with fire protection sprinkler systems, which brings ECU closer to its goal of having sprinkler systems in all residential buildings by 2012, he said.

Lucier said about half of the residence halls on campus have sprinkler systems now.

Cotten Hall is receiving an upgrade to its air-conditioning system, he said. White Hall will have improved handicapped accessibility and Garrett Hall got two ADA accessible entrances/exits with ramps for wheelchair use, new individual shower doors in all of the bathrooms and new exterior and interior doors intended to improve fire protection.
"We do a wealth of projects every summer," Lucier said. "From individual room touch ups like painting, carpet cleaning and waxing tiles and all those little repairs that are very difficult to do when the students live with us."

Josh Humphries can be contacted at jhumphries@coxnc.com and (252) 329-9565.
ECU camp helps students 'Reach Up' in science

By
ECU News Services

Sunday, July 19, 2009

A summer camp at East Carolina University uses hands-on experiments in biology, chemistry and geology to help local African-American students develop an interest in science and science-related careers.

Last week, a group of Reach Up campers studied soils at different locations on campus. With the help of counselors and ECU faculty, the students used an infiltrometer to compare the rate of water infiltration in areas used by humans to those in undisturbed land.

"We do these measurements to show how urban land use has changed hydrology," Mike O'Driscoll, assistant professor of geology, said. "Through our findings, students can see how water sinks through undisturbed areas a lot easier."

Twenty-four students in grades six through eight in Pitt County Schools are participating in the three-week summer day camp, which continues through July 31.

The program is free to all participants, thanks to sponsorship by North Carolina GlaxoSmithKline Foundation Ribbon of Hope Program and ECU.

Six ECU students who major in chemistry, biology and geology serve as counselors and mentors for the campers. ECU faculty members Andrew Morehead (chemistry), Anthony Overton (biology) and Mike O'Driscoll (geology) supervise the laboratory activities for the middle school students. Cheryl Treadwell, a science teacher at C.M. Eppes Middle School, assists participants with designing science investigations. Rhea Miles, program director and an associate professor in the College of Education, directs the program.

Reach Up is one of several camps hosted by ECU this summer.

College of Business affordability lauded

A consumer group that rates and ranks online colleges for cost and credibility gives the College of Business at ECU top marks in its latest national survey.

The GetEducated.com survey ranks ECU as the No. 1 most affordable online business degree in the United States for both its undergraduate and graduate programs.

According to GetEducated.com, an undergraduate business degree earned online at ECU costs $11,880 for state residents. The average cost nationwide for a regionally accredited online business bachelor's degree is $43,241.

Earning a master of business administration degree at ECU costs $7,848 as an in-state student. According to GetEducated.com's National Survey of Online MBAs, the average cost of a program accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) is $32,200.

"Value is the difference between what you pay and what you get," Frederick Niswander, dean of the College of Business, said. "We provide high-quality, flexible undergraduate and graduate business degrees that offer tremendous value. That is exactly what we need to do, especially in these tough economic times.
"As an AACSB-accredited business school for more than 40 years, we are increasingly recognized as a national leader. Every day we continue to build on our strong value-proposition here at ECU," Niswander said.

Online bachelor degree rankings were based on GetEducated.com's spring 2009 survey of affordable online business and management degrees. The group compared and ranked the publicly posted tuition rates at 83 distance-learning bachelor's of management or administration programs offered through regionally accredited universities in the United States.

MBA rankings were based on a GetEducated.com survey of publicly posted tuition and fee rates for more than 390 online MBAs offered by 168 accredited distance-learning MBA programs in the United States. Tuition rates were for the entire MBA degree and typically reflect the least expensive option. Surveys are taken every two years.

Grants funds clinical psychology internship

Mental health resources in eastern North Carolina will increase thanks to new grant-funded program at ECU.

Dr. Kim Dixon, a clinical health psychologist and assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatric Medicine at the Brody School of Medicine at ECU, will lead the establishment of a community-based predoctoral psychology internship training program in clinical and health psychology funded by a $297,000 grant from the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

Goals of the project are to improve the quality of life and health status of low-income residents of eastern North Carolina as well as reduce racial health disparities by providing access to mental health services and behavioral specialists.

Clinical health psychology differs from traditional mental health care in its focus on how lifestyle and behavior impact health. Health psychologists apply scientific knowledge of the relationships among behavioral, emotional, cognitive, social and biological components of health to the promotion and maintenance of health and disease management.

"Besides the prevalence of untreated mental illness, physical illnesses with strong ties to lifestyle and behavioral factors are increasing in our area, suggesting that there is much work to be done in promoting behavior change that can improve health care outcomes," Dixon said. An example of a disease with strong associations to behavior and lifestyle is diabetes, which Dixon said has increased 119 percent in the past 26 years in eastern North Carolina.

Internships will be one year, and participants will be clinical psychology doctoral graduate students from universities across the country.

Plans are for the interns to work throughout eastern North Carolina including clinical sites of the Brody School of Medicine and University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina and in community health centers in Beaufort and Lenoir counties. They will provide integrated behavioral health care as well as mental health counseling and education. The project should begin by this fall, according to Dixon.

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust was created in 1947 by the will of Mrs. William N. Reynolds of Winston-Salem. Three-fourths of the trust's grants are designated for use for health-related programs and services across North Carolina and one-fourth for the poor and needy of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County.

Fine art print set on display at Joyner Library

A fine art print set will be on display in the Exhibit Area on the second floor of East Carolina University's Joyner Library through Aug. 31.

The exhibit is sponsored by the faculty and staff of Joyner Library's Teaching Resources Center.

The display draws from the North Carolina Adopted Textbook Collection given to the Teaching Resources Center by ECU alumna Kathy A. Taft, who represents the first education district on the North Carolina State School Board.

As a member of the Textbook Reconsideration Committee, Taft receives copies of all textbooks and auxiliary
items approved for adoption in North Carolina public schools. Following the textbook selection process, committee members can designate how the collection provided to them will be used.

Taft's gift in-kind to Joyner Library is valued at more than $2 million and is heavily used by education students, area educators and home-schoolers.

The Fine Art Print set is an ancillary portion of this collection. The event is free and open to the public.

Partnership with India offers global exposure

ECU students in an undergraduate software engineering class are preparing for a global work environment without having to leave campus.

For the fourth year, ECU professors and students will partner with MS University of Baroda in Vadodara, India to produce software for Unisys Global Services.

The project simulates a real-world software engineering experience. ECU students will be required to create complex software using state-of-the-art software engineering processes, practices and tools.

But what is done on the Greenville campus is only half of the project. ECU students must collaborate with students in India to produce the final software product that will be evaluated by Unisys.

The goal of the program is simple, said N.M.H. Tabrizi, ECU's software engineering program director. "We aim to broaden our students' global and cultural horizons, enhance professional networking skills and, of course, teach them how to effectively produce complex software while achieving an overall team goal," he said.

The students from ECU and MS University of Baroda participate in weekly formal meetings with faculty and Unisys officials. They also use free online chats, instant messaging and cell phones to communicate around the world.

Since 2007, more than 20 ECU students have benefited from the partnership. One of those students, Tatiana Cook, who will graduate in December 2009, found the experience to be challenging, exciting and very rewarding.

"I have a new understanding for collaboration and teamwork," Cook said. "I learned how to work with my ECU teammates as well as those thousands of miles away. We also learned how to successfully troubleshoot problems like time zones, communication breakdowns and conflict. It was a tremendous experience."

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Ex-provost Nielsen testifies for more than five hours

BY J. ANDREW CURLISS, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - Former N.C. State University provost Larry Nielsen wrapped up about 5 1/2 hours of testimony before a grand jury on Friday at the federal courthouse.

Nielsen spent about three hours testifying Friday, following about 2 1/2 hours Thursday.

Nielsen's lawyer, Thomas Manning of Raleigh, had said that Nielsen was expected to testify Friday for about an hour but that there were a lot of documents and other information to cover.

Grand juries conduct their work in secret, and neither Manning nor Nielsen, who declined to comment, would talk about any questions or answers.

Nielsen's testimony comes one month after NCSU's former chancellor, James Oblinger, testified before the grand jury for about three hours.

Federal authorities, who do not comment on their investigations, have issued subpoenas and sought information related to the hiring, promotion, salary and other details of a position at NCSU held by former first lady Mary Easley.

The NCSU trustees forced Mary Easley out last month amid continuing controversy about how she was hired in 2005 and then was offered a $170,000 per year position.

Former Gov. Mike Easley has said he is comfortable with an investigation into his years in public service.

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Swine Flu Expected to Return With Opening of School

By DONALD G. MCNEIL JR.

The swine flu will probably return in force earlier than seasonal flu usually begins, federal health officials predicted Friday, saying they expected it to erupt as soon as schools open rather than in October or November.

The swine flu is still circulating in the United States, especially in summer camps, even though hot weather has arrived and the regular flu season ended months ago, "so we expect challenges when people return to school, when kids are congregating together," Dr. Anne Schuchat, director of respiratory diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said in a telephone news conference held jointly with vaccine experts from the Food and Drug Administration and the Department of Health and Human Services.

It is still unclear how many doses of a swine flu vaccine will be available by then, and officials have been reluctant to make firm predictions beyond saying that they expect tens of millions, rather than hundreds of millions, and they plan to triage them to people who are the most vulnerable, like pregnant women and people who are the most likely to encounter the flu, like health care workers.

The number of doses available will depend on how fast seed strains grow, how much protection a small dose provides, and whether immune-system boosters called adjuvants are needed and prove to be safe; adjuvants are not used in American flu vaccines now.

Clinical trials testing those questions are expected to take another couple of months, said Dr. Jesse L. Goodman, director of the F.D.A.'s Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research.

Assuming a swine flu vaccination campaign begins, it will be voluntary, Dr. Schuchat emphasized, but she "strongly encouraged" pregnant women to get both a seasonal flu shot and a swine flu shot when they are available.

The C.D.C. has been closely following the disease in the Southern Hemisphere winter, and it is mimicking the patterns seen in the United States and Mexico in the spring, she said.

Most infections and most serious cases are in children and young adults, and those with underlying conditions, including pregnancy, are the most likely to die. Dr. Schuchat likened the spread's unpredictability to that of popcorn: one city could see an explosion of cases and overwhelmed hospitals while another saw few.

Her most important message, she added, was that "the virus isn't gone, and we fully expect there will be challenges in the fall."