A Message from CAHS Dean Stephen Thomas

I recently published my second article on allied health in the North Carolina Medical Journal. The latest article entitled “New Initiatives in Allied Health in North Carolina” (Volume 75, Number 1, January/February 2014, page 45 - http://www.ncmedicaljournal.com/archives/?75111) is another opportunity to educate the medical professions about the allied health professions and the important role we play in health and health care delivery. We all know the issue - allied health by name does not represent who we are as well as titles such as medicine, nursing, dentistry, and pharmacy. I am often asked “What is allied health?” and I give my quick “elevator speech” in which I name several of our departments and then the light bulb lights up—they understand. That often leads to a more in depth and engaging discussion about allied health professions.

I have often referred to allied health as an “alliance” of smaller but significant professions that, collectively, are larger than medicine or nursing. By themselves, they are unable to bargain as effectively as the larger professions of medicine, nursing and dentistry. Therefore, they form an alliance in order to garner their fair share of the health and health care resources, particularly in higher education. I recently attended a Southern Association of Allied Health Deans Meeting at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, where I was employed in my first professional position in their rehabilitation center in 1970 (I felt like I was going home). At the opening session, their allied health dean, Dr. Elizabeth Protas, referred to the method for addressing this issue as “Single Voice Advocacy.” That phrase has stayed with me. It offers a very direct approach...
10th Annual Jean Mills Health Symposium to take place Feb. 7

For ten years, the Jean Mills Health Symposium has addressed health and health equity issues of minority populations, particularly in eastern North Carolina to audiences as large as 175 participants that have included health care providers, faith based organizations, community leaders, students and faculty. Through the symposium, Amos T. Mills III, Jean’s brother, has help keep her spirit of discovery and community outreach alive.

This year’s symposium will take place February 7 at the ECU Heart Institute with the theme, “Navigating Health Equity in the Next Decade”. The College of Allied Health Sciences along with ECU Medical and Health Sciences Foundation will welcome Dr. Lori Carter-Edwards, deputy director for research and operations for the UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (HPDP) and research associate professor of health behavior at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health as the keynote speaker for the event.

Dr. Carter-Edwards will address what she sees as the long-term picture and forecast of the direction of health and health care within the Affordable Care Act on the consumers in rural areas of the state.

Following Dr. Carter-Edwards’ lecture will be a panel discussion and a lunch and presentation. Then, symposium attendees can choose between two concurrent sessions. Dr. Essie Torres from AMEXCAN will lead a session discussing health concerns of Latinos in North Carolina and the role of community based organizations in fostering the appreciation, understand, and prosperity the motivation behind my desire to write the article for the NCMJ. As dean, it is my role to promote the high demand disciplines within the College of Allied Health Sciences. That has always been and will always be a core responsibility of my job. I would like to close by challenging each and every one of you to use “single voice advocacy” when sharing the value of the allied health professions with other health care providers and the public. With the many changes occurring in health care, it is the professional disciplines within allied health that can help deliver cost-effective, high quality, and patient-centered health and health care services throughout our state and nation.

I hope you enjoy this latest edition of the Alliance and please know how much we value your interest and participation in the College of Allied Health Sciences.
During the winter break, Department of Physical Therapy students Sarah Billings, Lisa Halsey, and Blair Meiggs joined forces with Virginia Commonwealth University physical therapy students to serve the less fortunate people of Costa Rica. During the visit, the students were able to utilize the skills that they have learned in the classroom, as well as in the clinic, to help improve multiple people’s quality of life.

The group spent their time working extremely hard to educate the patients on the importance of being active and maintaining proper body mechanics throughout their daily life.

“It was an honor for me to be given the opportunity to travel to Costa Rica and be able to use the skills I have learned in the classroom and clinic. The people of Costa Rica have opened my eyes and heart to a different way of life. I went to Costa Rica to give to those in need, but I have realized they gave me much more than I could have ever given them,” said Billings.

The mission team consisted of a local physical therapist named Andrés, 10 DPT students, 9 undergraduates, and Spanish translators.

The group agreed that they learned a significant amount about finding different ways to communicate besides with spoken language.

Through their compassion and body language, the students were able to show their patients that they cared, which allowed the patients to trust what the students were doing with them.

During their time spent in two different nursing homes in a community called Providencia, the students said their eyes were opened to the great need for easier access to health care in general. It is not uncommon for people to wait 18 months to be seen and several patients who had scheduled a doctor’s and/or a PT appointment were not going to be seen until 2016. It was also not uncommon for patients to arrive to PT in their wheelchair in restraints, despite being able to walk, with multiple contractures only to receive modalities such as heat, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), or ultrasound for their treatment.

“We did our best to lead by example and get these people up and moving around. It was heart-warming to see the ear-to-ear smiles on these people’s faces when they walked for the first time in years,” said
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of Mexican and Latino communities through culture, leadership, health advocacy and education.

Another session led by Terri Joyner, Pitt County Schools nurse supervisor and Leslie Ricker from the Wayne Initiative for School Health, will focus on the innovative contributions of school nurses in reducing health disparities.

The second afternoon session entitled “Using Mobile Clinics to Address Health Disparities” will center around two ambulatory clinics offered by Winston Salem State RAMS Know H.O.W. (Healthcare on Wheels) and the ECU Operation Re-Entry North Carolina mobile van.

Throughout the day, posters and displays can be viewed in the atrium area.

To register for the 2014 Jean Mills Health Symposium visit https://piratealumni.ecu.edu/ccon/events.do and search for events in February 2014. Visit www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs.ah/jeamills.cfm for more information about the symposium.

The keynote speaker from the 2013 Mills Symposium Dr. Janice Probst, Director of the South Carolina Rural Health Research Center, shared valuable knowledge about innovative methods to address minority health in rural communities.

OT Students demonstrate how ROADI can simulate an accurate driving environment for road experience.
A series of strokes changed Ervin and Susan Harris’ plans for retirement but not their outlook for living a good life.

Active in the church and in the Bear Grass community where he and his wife live, 63-year-old Ervin Harris had four strokes just days apart in April 2011. The first came after physical therapy for knee surgery. “We went directly from rehabilitation to the emergency room,” Susan said.

At first, Ervin was unable to swallow or talk but months of therapy helped him to walk, eat and care for himself again. A lingering effect has been aphasia, an acquired communication disorder typically caused by stroke or head injury which impairs a person’s ability to speak, understand, read or write but does not affect their intelligence, humor or personality.

Ervin attends the aphasia group for two hours each Friday in East Carolina University’s College of Allied Health Sciences where participants interact with graduate students and faculty in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders through games, drawings or other mental exercises. “He’s a social person. Seeing other people deal with the same issues he is, at different stages, gives him hope and encouragement,” said Susan, an ECU alumna. “This group has allowed him to share his interests. That’s normalcy. Individuals don’t go back into a cocoon of illness; independence is the goal. And we’re reminded of that every week.”

The continuum of care and network of resources at ECU and Vidant Medical Center have made a difference in his recovery, Susan said. “Everything helps. We’re so thankful for where we are,” she said.

About 1 million Americans are living with aphasia and approximately 80,000 new cases are diagnosed each year. It is more common than Parkinson’s disease, ALS or cerebral palsy yet most people have not heard of it.

Research on aphasia

Last year ECU welcomed associate Associate Dean for Research Heather Harris Wright, whose lab is dedicated to improving communication for people who’ve had stroke or brain injury.

Two of her doctoral students have a background in linguistics. “It’s a very nice complement,” Wright said. “I learn from them too - especially with their unique background in looking at the semantics of words and sentences. They have a deeper understanding of language theory and the subtleties of language.” Wright and her masters’ and doctoral students are investigating written and spoken communication and cognitive abilities across the adult lifespan. She is recruiting people with aphasia to participate in a study.

“I’m interested in how individuals communicate and what role their memory, attention, and executive function abilities play in their ability to communicate with others,” Wright said. “One of the main

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goals is to develop a normative database for discourse ability for comparison to individuals with aphasia to better diagnose communication difficulties in aphasia. Ultimately we want to determine best practices for improving communication abilities in individuals with aphasia.”

As people age, memory and attention decline. “An 80-year-old tells a story very differently than a 20-year-old,” Wright said. “The intent of communication changes as we age. Older adults look at every opportunity to engage in communication, and this plays out in how they tell stories.”

Wright is seeking funding for additional studies to investigate interaction between memory and attention and communication abilities in older adults and adults with aphasia and other communication impairments. The work previously has been funded by the National Institutes of Health and National Institute on Aging.

Older adults with aphasia – where language has been taken away – are dealt a double whammy since communication is very important to social health and daily life, Wright said.

It’s important for people with aphasia to not be isolated, Wright said. “Patients can continue to improve if they stay communicatively active,” she said. “It won’t be rapid but they will improve. It can have a positive domino effect.”

Engaging with others, using language, listening, reading, emailing – anything that uses language – is helpful, Wright said.

The road ahead

Because aphasia is not well known, there often are misperceptions about people who have aphasia, Wright said. “You may hear of individuals living with aphasia who have been mistakenly confused for ‘being drunk,’ ‘not smart,’ or ‘intellectually impaired,’

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ECU Associate Dean for Research for CAHS Heather Wright runs a lab dedicated to enhancing recovery for people who have experienced a stroke or brain injury. Wright directs graduate students in interactions designed to assist people suffering from aphasia, which impairs an individual’s ability to communicate. (Photos by Cliff Hollis)

“Wright said. “Just because they can’t speak, doesn’t mean they don’t understand. Oftentimes they are able to understand every word that is said. They have their memories. They just can’t access the words to tell you about them.”

Some communication strategies include: using yes or no questions; engaging in normal activities and involving the individual in conversations; talking to the person, not about the person; using simpler sentences and emphasizing key words; repeating information if needed; giving the person with aphasia time to speak and not finish their thoughts or sentences.

The ECU aphasia group, which usually has eight to 12 participants, has been offered the past three years.

“We’re always trying to find different activities to do and contacting different aphasia groups to see what’s working,” said Sherri Winslow, clinical supervisor in communication sciences and disorders.

“The class provides a connection with other people in addition to practicing

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Physician Assistant Clinical Assistant Professors, Elizabeth Bunting and Julie Daniel-Yount presented a lecture entitled “Preceptor Recruitment and Retention through the Lenses of a New and Established Program”. The lecture was given in collaboration with the Clinical Coordinating Faculty at Elon University, Diane Duffy and Tracey Tonsor during the annual Physician Assistant Education Association Educational Forum held in Memphis this year.

In the session, Bunting and Daniel-Yount represented an established program and were able to highlight collaborative efforts that the North Carolina Physician Assistant Programs have had in the Clinical Phase in the last year with a meeting at the Stead Center in Durham, NC and hosted by Duke University PA Program.

Dr. Robert Campbell


Dr. Steven Sligar published

Steven Sligar, EdD, CVE, PVE from the Department of Addiction and Rehabilitation Studies and colleagues Drs. Cawthorn (U of TX-Austin), Morere (Gallaudet University), and Moxley (California School for the Deaf-Fremont) had a journal article published entitled “Equity in Assessment for Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing” in the fall 2013 issue of the “Journal of the American Deafness and Rehabilitation Association”.

Leigh Cellucci, PhD, MBA, Associate Professor in the Department of Health Services and Information Management, has recently published a textbook Healthcare Marketing: A Case Study Approach by Health Administration Press. The book information can be find here.

Journal Article Published by DARS Faculty & Students

Dr. Mary Crozier, associate professor, Dr. Martha Chapin, professor, and doctoral students Jeffrey Thomas, and Alicia Bell of the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Services had a journal article published entitled “Training doctoral students to teach online” in “Ideas and Research You Can Use: VISTAS 2013”, a publication of the American Counseling Association.

To view more exciting news involving the faculty, students and programs at the College of Allied Health Sciences visit www.ecu.edu/ah!
Drs. Anne Dickerson, Denise Donica, and Mary Hildebrand from the Department of Occupational Therapy spoke at the AOTA NBCOT 2013 Education Summit in Atlanta, GA this month. Dr. Dickerson and Dr. Donica presented, “Pedagogy for Enhancing Scholarship: A Framework for Successful Student-Faculty Research Endeavors (Parts 1 and 2). Dr. Hildebrand presented a poster entitled, “An Occupational and Physical Therapy Student Lab: First-Steps for an Interprofessional Education Collaboration in a College of Allied Health Sciences”.

Dr. Susie Harris, associate professor and director of the master’s in Health Informatics and Information Management Program in the Department of Health Services and Information Management served on a panel discussion entitled “Transitioning into Health Informatics” at the Health informatics Career & Internship Fair in October at the UNC Charlotte’s Center City Campus. The panel also included educators from Health Informatics graduate programs at Duke University, the UNC-Chapel Hill and UNC-Charlotte.

Dr. Leonard Trujillo, department chair and Dr. Debbie Amini, associate professor from the Department of Occupational Therapy, published an article entitled “Creating a custom fabricated neoprene orthosis for optimal positioning”, featured in the Oct. 2013 issue of the Journal of Hand Therapy (V26, No.4 pages 365-368).

Physician Assistant Clinical Assistant Professor
Martin Mayer has been invited to become a member of the United States Board of the British Medical Journal Fellows as a U.S. Fellow. Mayer is the first physician assistant to be offered this role.

As a US Fellow with the BMJ, he will: serve as a representative and liaison for the BMJ and US authors (e.g. by encouraging submission of important research to the BMJ), give advice to the journal to help continue to both raise its impact and nurture interest in the US, and provide editorial comments and peer review. The BMJ is one of the world’s leading general medical journals and the fourth most cited general medical journal in the world, and the most cited open access general medical journal in the world.

“I have been an enormous fan of the BMJ since I first started reading medical journals given their steadfast dedication and rigorous approach to evidence-based medicine,” said Mayer, “The fact that they make their content open access is nothing short of phenomenal.
College of Allied Health Sciences Leads the Way in Technology

With technology ever-changing, the College of Allied Health Sciences is leading the way for the University with new equipment in an Allied Health Sciences building classroom that will open up new possibilities for professors and students alike.

“Fall semester saw the introduction to a new room setup and during winter break more of our rooms will benefit from this same technology,” said Jean Merenda, educational technology specialist.

The new technology is controlled by a Crestron touch screen monitor that allows for full integration of Microsoft “Ink” tools. Through this tool, professors can use a stylus to take notes directly on the screen during a presentation, highlighting key points and adding thoughts that can be saved for viewing later on.

With the easy-to-use software, switching between different sources such as laptops, iPads or USB drives will be much easier and fluid, cutting down the time devoted to setting up for a lecture or presentation. Now professors and students can switch between devices seamlessly with minimum interruption time.

Also featured in the new classroom design is a state-of-the-art document camera with a high resolution than the ones currently being used in classrooms, and also takes up less room on the podium. Classroom 1345 is also equipped with a “bridge” system which will enable instructors to use the in-room camera for Skype and WebConferencing sessions. Through this technology, students can conference with other classes across the state, or enjoy a guest lecturer without travel expense. This technology will soon be available for all classrooms that currently have in-room cameras.

Air Media software will be a standard in the classroom as well and will allow students to connect and project from their personal devices. Through this software, students can easily share without having to disconnect one laptop and plugging in another to project on the screen.

“One of the neatest additions is the Air Media software which will enable students to share their desktops without leaving their seat,” said Merenda.

The new software is a great addition to the College of Allied Health Sciences and will assist in making lectures more accessible and interactive.
New certificate focuses on continued aid for military personnel

The College of Allied Health Science is adding a fourth certificate to the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Studies with the new certificate in military and trauma counseling (MTC) program. The program will prepare graduate students enrolled in counselor education programs to work effectively with the psychosocial and mental health needs of military personnel, veterans, disabled veterans, and their families. Students will also acquire the knowledge and skills to work effectively with those who have experienced civilian trauma.

“More than two million American troops have deployed to the Middle East since September 11, 2001 in support of the Global War on Terror,” said Dr. Mark Stebnicki, professor and Coordinator of the Military and Trauma Counseling Certificate, “More servicemen and women are surviving combat injuries than ever before due to improved battlefield medicine, post-operative medical technology, and better body armor. Many have experienced catastrophic physical injuries/disabilities (i.e., traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, and amputations) and serious mental health concerns (i.e., post traumatic stress, substance abuse, and behavioral addictions).”

Stebnicki added that transitioning from active duty to civilian life requires a unique understanding of the medical, physical, psychological, and career needs of the individual service member, as well as family members, and significant others. The new certificate will provide graduates with the skills needed to aid military personnel and veterans with that transition.

“There are unique differences in counseling persons in community mental health versus military and veteran settings,” said Stebnicki, “Because of these differences, the MTC program specializes in training students how to work competently in the diagnosis, therapeutic interventions, and rehabilitation treatment planning of service men and women who are transitioning from active duty to civilian life.”

Providing services such as these for military personnel is a large focus in the department. Dr. Paul Toriello, the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Services chair secured an $828,956 grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services to help equip the Operation Re-Entry van with satellite communication and new telehealth technology that provides clinical care long-distance.

With the new equipment, the Operation Re-Entry van can deliver medical, psychiatric and behavioral health services in an ambulatory unit that can travel to veterans and their families instead of making them travel for services.

To be eligible for the MTC certificate program students must be admitted by the Graduate School as a degree or certificate student and meet the minimum admission criteria including a letter of intent, a GPA of 2.7, and consent of the MTC Program Coordinator.
CAHS is pleased to introduce our new faculty!

Balaji Rangarathnam, PhD joined the staff in Oct. as an Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Dr. Rangarathnam holds a doctorate from the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and both a masters and bachelor’s degree in speech-language pathology and speech hearing from the University of Mysore in India.

Lucia Mendez, PhD, CCC-SLP joined the staff in Jan. as an assistant professor in the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders. Dr. Mendez holds a doctorate in speech sciences from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master’s degree in speech-language pathology from Purdue University.

“The participating in this medical mission trip not only allowed me to serve those in need, but also taught me valuable skills that I could bring back to North Carolina. There were not many resources in Costa Rica, which encouraged us to learn how to provide effective treatments without the use of a lot of equipment or tools. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to learn and serve!”

Meiggs, “Although we went to give to the people of this community, we think it’s safe to say that they blessed us far more than we could ever imagine. We are extremely thankful for all the support we have received from this community and our friends and families.”

Halsey echoed Meiggs and Billings’ sentiments saying, “Participating in this medical mission trip not only allowed me to serve those in need, but also taught me valuable skills that I could bring back to North Carolina. There were not many resources in Costa Rica, which encouraged us to learn how to provide effective treatments without the use of a lot of equipment or tools. I am grateful to have had this opportunity to learn and serve!”

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about the communication skills. Communication is not just speaking, but writing, gesturing and reading. It’s a safe place where they can connect with others of similar experience,” she said.

Ervin and Susan Harris have been supported by their friends and family, and hope to help educate others about aphasia.

“Just because the communication is not there doesn’t mean the intelligence and the person’s not there,” Susan said. “There is a way to communicate. When you care enough about a person, you find a way.”

Ervin talks often through body movement and facial expressions, and can say a few words. He can write his name and address, Susan said. “My husband could be a quiet person, but he’s not,” she said. “Everybody has a contribution to make. Although his talents have changed, he’s still a man with purpose. There are no accidents. We’re here for a reason.”

About the Alliance

Formerly an annual/bi-annual alumni magazine, the Alliance is now a quarterly newsletter. It is designed to connect, engage and inform alumni, faculty, staff and friends of CAHS.

We welcome your email and comments. Please contact us at edmondsonl@ecu.edu.