The beginning of a new year brings with it the prospect of change, of improvement, of a fresh start. We often hear the message “out with the old, in with the new.” But a new year also brings an opportunity to reflect on the months past, and remember what we’ve done with that time and the change we’ve made in our world.

Here at the M-CHE, 2014 was a huge year for us, and we are proud of our accomplishments. More than that, however, we are deeply indebted to the community around us, for welcoming us into their midst, and for helping us to realize
our goals. One of our central goals has always been to work with and in the communities that surround us, and this past year we have solidified relationships with our Prince George’s County neighborhoods and have partnered with numerous local, regional, and national organizations to expand our reach to new heights. We are especially thankful to our own University of Maryland community for all the support it has given to us throughout the year.

In this issue of our newsletter, we’d like to share a summary of our biggest events and our proudest accomplishments from 2014, while we recognize and thank all our partners who helped us transform our innovative ideas into reality. We’ll feature selected highlights that best reflect our commitment to promoting health and eliminating health disparities.

As we look ahead to the coming year, we have plans to continue moving forward with our mission. We will be completing several of our research projects and will be able to shift from data collection to analysis and dissemination. We will also be focusing much of our attention this coming year on maintaining and deepening our relationships with several community partners, including the traditional Muslim Al-Huda School and the expansion of our HAIR network of barbershops and salons in Prince Georges County. As always, we will bring you more information throughout the year on our webpage and through our quarterly newsletters.

Happy New Year to you all!

Research Highlights

Global Public Health Concerns and M-CHE

In 2014, the spread of the Ebola virus in West Africa shook the world, sparking concerns of a global epidemic, while highlighting the poor conditions and lack of medical resources for those afflicted with the disease in those West African countries that were hardest hit with the disease. M-CHE’s Senior Associate Director Sandra Quinn brought a new perspective to the spread of pandemic disease: how social determinants influence which populations are hardest hit. While we watched in real time the difference in treatments and outcomes for people with and those without the best medical care, Dr. Quinn reported on the public health science of how pandemics disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Her article was included in a special theme issue of Biosecurity and Bioterrorism. Dr. Quinn was also interviewed about the Ebola epidemic by Voice of America. The full video coverage of the story by Jeff Seldin can be seen here. To read Dr. Quinn’s article in Biosecurity and Bioterrorism, click here.

Our team also presented results from numerous other research projects throughout 2014 in print and in oral and poster presentations at local, national, and international scientific meetings. In all, we published 14 peer-reviewed articles, covering a range of topics from tobacco use, domestic violence, vaccine acceptance, depression, among others. Click here for a complete list of our 2014 publications.
New Research: Close to Home and a Global Reach

Our future research plans include a number of exciting announcements for 2015. We look forward to completing our COE research projects including the Vaccine Study, Preventing Obesity (SHAPE), and the Black Men's Health project, which will allow us to switch from data collection to analysis and dissemination. Additionally, we are establishing several international collaborations of note. Dr. Thomas has been working with a delegation from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland to raise awareness about health disparities under conditions of systematic discrimination and social strife, and Dr. Quinn has received a grant from UMD to work with colleagues in Israel at Tel-Aviv University on public attitudes toward vaccines, particularly among specific cultural groups within each nation. Dr. Quinn, along with Drs. Freimuth and Hilyard from the Vaccine Disparities study team, and a new colleague, Dr. Brooke Liu, from our own campus were in Tel Aviv for four days of workshops to plan a joint research study. It is with the NIMHD funding support of our COE that we can leverage additional resources to support our international work.

We will also continue our research efforts with the Muslim community through Al-Huda school, conducting a series of focus groups with the parents and teachers in the school community to determine their health needs.

Finally, one unique aspect of our research endeavors involves the expansion of our Health Advocates In-Reach and Research (HAIR) Initiative. In 2015, through funding from a World of Difference Grant from the Cigna Foundation, we will expand our current HAIR network to ten barbershops and salons. In these shops we will increase awareness about colorectal cancer and colorectal cancer screening in the African American community, and will include an intervention to see how family health history to assess risk of developing colorectal cancer influences screening behavior.

Community Engagement

While we have made progress in all our COE Core areas, perhaps our most visible moments fall into our Community Outreach and Engagement efforts this past year. One of our cornerstone goals at the M-CHE is to reach out to the communities around us that are most affected by health disparities. 2014 was a year in which we really focused on deepening the relationships with several communities and providing services and education to people in need, while also raising awareness about the persistence of health disparities.

We held two large-scale, highly visible events in 2014. The first of these was the health Equity Drum Circle: Drum Beats for Health and Wellness, which we planned in collaboration with the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. This event was held on Maryland Day 2014 on the UMD campus, and was one of the main events during the annual campus-wide celebration. The goal of the Drum Circle was set a
record for the largest hand drum ensemble in the name of raising awareness about health disparities and health equity in a fun and exciting way. Throughout the event, we entertained 900-1,000 visitors and the 650-700 joining in the hand drum ensemble made it one of the largest single events as Maryland Day 2014, and the largest hand drum ensemble in the State of Maryland. Thank you to all our sponsors, volunteers, and visitors for helping make this such a success!

Our most significant high-impact event was a prime example of our 4th Generation Health Disparities approach to research, in which we put knowledge into action. On September 5-6, 2014, the M-CHE, along with Catholic Charities of Washington, DC, transformed the UMD Xfinity Center basketball court into a free, emergency dental clinic for the 2014 Mid-MD Mission of Mercy & Health Equity Festival (MOM-HEF). This event mobilized nearly 1,800 volunteers and provided emergency dental care to approximately 1,260 Maryland residents, including fillings, extractions, crowns, root canals, and cleanings. In addition to the dental services provided, over 20 exhibitors were present to provide additional free medical and public health services such as flu shots, rapid HIV screens, eye exams, cholesterol checks, and legal services from UMB School of Law, nutrition education, health literacy, and other life saving services. Our service to the community demonstrates our commitment to transforming our knowledge about health and health disparities into action. Both the number of volunteers and the number of patients served exceeded our expectations and we were pleased to have major TV and print media coverage as well as a live broadcast on the Joe Madison Series XM-Radio program. Approximately, $1.5M in dental care was delivered over the two days. See more about the MOM-HEF here.

**TRAINING & EDUCATION**

Our education and training efforts are also a central component of our mission, and in 2014, we had several significant highlights in these efforts.

**A National Research Mentoring Network**

Perhaps our most exciting news was learning late in the year that we are part of the larger team that had had been awarded “National Research Mentoring Network for a Diverse Biomedical Workforce” (NRMN) grant from the NIH. The M-CHE will be the recipient of a sub-contract of this $2.2M award, which is led by a team of researchers at Boston College, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of North Texas Health Sciences Center, and University of Minnesota. The NRMN initiative calls for an array of activities aimed at facilitating the persistence of under-represented minority students and scholars, from undergraduate through junior faculty, and foster their success in biomedical research careers. The NRMN is a major component of the NIH’s effort to diversify the biomedical research workforce. Read more about the NRMN and our award here.
Also in 2014, we launched the Public Health Critical Race Praxis Institute. Twenty-one post-docs and assistant professors from around the country gathered in MD learn how best to integrate critical race theory into their public health research while navigating the challenges of the promotion and tenure track. Scholars were encouraged to pursue public health work that will help them incorporate critical race theory into their research designed to close the disparities gap, and were offered resources and a support network to help them persist. We are continuing to follow-up with the scholars at regular intervals to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. We are analyzing results from our evaluation forms presented to the scholars, and those results will be forthcoming in 2015.

Health Equity Leadership Institute: 5 Years of Success

2014 also included the 5th annual Health Equity Leadership Institute (HELI), which was a special alumni-centric program. HELI is an intensive weeklong "research boot camp" designed to increase the number of minority scholars and scholars committed to health disparities research. Our aim is to ensure the success of these scholars in tenure track academic appointments in schools of public health, medicine and other health science disciplines, assisting them in achieving research funding through the National Institutes of Health and other federal and state agencies. The program is offered jointly by the M-CHE and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Collaborative Center for Health Equity, with support from the NIH's National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The 2014 institute had representation from each of the 4 previous cohorts as a "booster" for several who were coming up for promotion and tenure.
STUDENT AND STAFF NEWS

Last year brought some exiting news for many of our M-CHE faculty, staff and students. Associate Director Craig Fryer was the recipient of the 2014 George F. Kramer "Practitioner of the Year" Award. This award is presented to a School of Public Health faculty member for doing an outstanding job of putting theory into practice.

Associate Director Dr. James Butler III was selected as a 2014 University of Maryland Undergraduate Studies Faculty Fellow. Fellows in this program participate in a faculty learning community that considers the challenges and opportunities in teaching large enrollment courses had how to structure them to achieve the highest student success.

Congratulations to our student worker Danielle Motley on her graduation in December. Danielle has achieved her MPH, and is continuing on with us as Faculty Research Assistant. Well done, Danielle!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Public Health Research @ Maryland: The Changing Climate and Health
April 9, 2015 8:45 am-5:00 pm
http://sph.umd.edu/event/public-health-research-maryland-changing-climate-and-health

In the NEWS

Experimental Drugs and the Ethics of Fighting Ebola
(The New York Times, December 1, 2014)
From the New York Times Opinion Page…more.

The Racial Gap in Health has been Shrinking for Decades—But it Still hasn’t Closed
(The Washington Post, by Jeff Guo, December 29, 2014)
Life expectancy for white Americans jumped over 100 years ago. It’s taken decades for black Americans to catch up…more.

Percentage of Poor Students in Public Schools Rises
Just over half of all students attending public schools in the United States are now eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, according to a new analysis of federal data…more.