

AAAS NEWS AND NOTES

edited by Coimbra Sirica

EDUCATION

Libraries Serving as Bridge in Health Education Effort

According to data cited by the National Center for Health Statistics, death rates from heart disease are more than 40% higher among African Americans than among whites, and death rates from cancer are 30% higher. Among Hispanics, diabetes kills a disproportionate number of people—their death rate is twice that of non-Hispanic whites. The federal government's Healthy People 2010 report estimates that 40 million people have no physician, health center, or clinic they can turn to regularly for health care and advice.

"We have made remarkable progress in medicine, but the gap in access to information and care persists," says Beatrix Hamburg, a psychiatrist and expert in issues affecting minority health, and visiting scholar at Cornell University Medical Center in New York City.

Hamburg is a member of an advisory committee for an initiative that AAAS is sponsoring in an effort to help overcome the disparities reflected in current national health statistics. With a \$1.34-million grant from the National Institutes of Health, the AAAS Directorate for Education and Human Resources has launched the Healthy People 2010 Library Initiative, with a goal of reaching into mostly low-income minority communities to provide understandable information about the science of health, and to train librarians to respond to their patrons' concerns.

At first, Hamburg was skeptical about the notion of a library as a source of health care information for people with limited educations. But after hearing an account of a health education initiative at a public library in Wheaton, Maryland, she became sold on the idea.

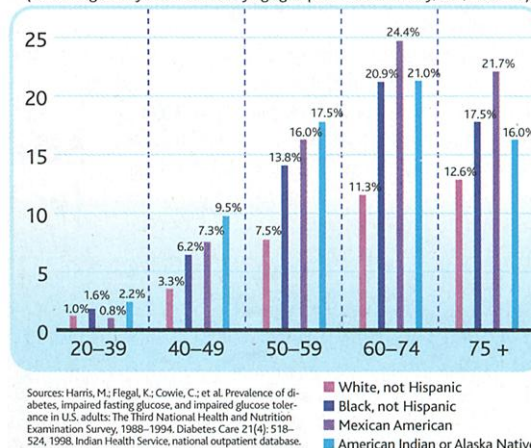
"It struck me that a library may be one of the very few institutions in a community that may not even have a clinic or a hospital," Hamburg said. "There is a huge amount of information out there, and I could see how poor people would not have the education to evaluate it. So they can go to a librarian, who will help them."

The library initiative, which will be evaluated for use as a national model, will eventually provide libraries with a "tool kit" that will include audiotapes and brochures and posters to promote public education activities, as well as seven booklets that will cover health-related topics in simple and understandable language. The first will discuss biomedical research and how outcomes of research can influence people in their daily lives. The others will address topics such as diabetes, heart disease and stroke, nutrition, cancer, and respiratory disease. The booklets will also

be available on the Internet. The project will be tested on a pilot basis in perhaps five libraries over the next 2 years. It will then be expanded to include libraries across the country.

"We believe we have a different approach that is not prevention alone, but science," says Maria Sosa, co-principal investigator with Shirley Malcom, director of the Directorate for Education and Human Resources. "One of our fundamental goals is to be neutral and not biased. Rather than judging people for their behaviors, we just

Proportion of Population with Diabetes
(Persons aged 20 years and older by age group and race/ethnicity, U.S., 1988–94)



The proportion of the population with diabetes (persons aged 20 years and older by age group and race/ethnicity, United States, 1988–1994).

provide them with information. This is the AAAS approach, and we feel it has worked in the past."

The consequences of ignorance and poverty are brought home daily to Constance Smith-Hendricks, an advisory board member of the library initiative and associate professor in the Department of Family and Community Health at the University of South Carolina. Smith-Hendricks, who provides services in rural clinical settings, describes a woman who came to her with open lesions that indicated advanced breast cancer. The patient could not say why she had waited so long.

"People need information; they need early screening; they need to be empowered," Smith-Hendricks says. "We hope that people will see themselves in the stories they read in the library initiative booklets, and that they will be encouraged to seek help."

AWARDS

Reviewers Sought for Journalism Awards

Scientists are needed to review entries in this year's AAAS Science Journalism Awards Program, sponsored by the Whitaker Foundation. Since the program's inception in 1945, more than 300 individuals have been honored for their significant achievements in the field of science reporting. The awards are highly coveted among the science journalism community, and the winners are honored each year at the AAAS annual meeting.

Independent screening and judging committees comprised of scientists and science journalists select the winning entries. The reviewers screen radio and television reports for scientific accuracy. If you would like to volunteer, and can be in the Washington, D.C., area sometime in August or September, contact Nisha Narayanan at the AAAS News and Information Office (call 202-326-6434 or e-mail nnarayan@aaas.org).

INTERNET

AAAS Launches Web Site; Expands Member Services

At noon on 20 September 1848, a group of scientists met in the library of the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia to establish the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which the founders resolved should exist, in part, to promote communication among scientists, to encourage and guide the direction of scientific research, and "to procure for the labours of scientific men, increased facilities and a wider usefulness."

The founders of AAAS envisioned a role for the organization that it still fulfills, but living before the advent of the automobile or the telephone, they could not have imagined the speed and convenience of the online world that is now at the fingertips of members worldwide.

With the introduction of a new Web site (www.aaasmember.org) this year, AAAS is inviting its members to become part of a virtual community that provides free access to *Science* articles published as far back as 1880, previews of research articles published in *Science*, discounts on books, links to career information, and daily news stories about science policy and research.

For John Ferguson, a professor of biology at Bard College, the new Web site represents "a stunning difference" in his professional life. "The Web site allows me to find classic papers from *Science* and to share them with my students," says Ferguson, who teaches a course on genetics with a historical perspective.

"I was looking for a clean copy of a 1964 paper by (Marshall) Nirenberg that described his work on the genetic code, when I got an e-mail from AAAS saying I could find it on www.aaasmember.org," says Ferguson. "I was truly grateful."

Eventually, members will also have easy access to a directory of members, searchable by name or discipline, as well as a search engine that will seek out relevant information across all AAAS-sponsored Web sites. A recent decision by the AAAS board, effective in January 2002, will provide members with online access to *Science*, which has in the past required payment of an additional fee.

"When you sign on to www.aaasmember.org, you are connecting to the past and the future of *Science* magazine, and not just this week's issue," says Michael Spinella, Director of the Office of Membership and Meetings.



The home page of www.aaasmember.org.

Access to the new site may be obtained by signing on to www.aaasmember.org, and following instructions to obtain a password. Members who have already signed on to *Science* Online may use their passwords for that site to sign on to www.aaasmember.org.

INTERNATIONAL

Science Training for U.S. Diplomats

President Bush's visit to Europe in June reflected the increasing importance of science in the conduct of foreign policy. Food safety, global warming, and missile defense were among the topics the president and his advisors had to confront in their conversations with European leaders. The message that science and technology issues are integral to foreign policy has not been lost on U.S. diplomats.

"The whole area of environment, technology, and health is becoming a really big priority for us—much more than 10, or even 5 years ago," says Lisa Fox, director of the Economic and Commercial Studies Division for the Foreign Service Institute (FSI). "We'd like to train all our officers in it, beginning with junior officers all the way up to the ambassadors."

Recently, for the first time since the FSI began sponsoring special training courses on science and foreign policy, AAAS's Directorate for International Programs was chosen to plan and implement a week-long program for 20 employees of the U.S. State Department, most of whom were being assigned to their first science-related posts. The course, entitled "Environment, Science, Technology, and Health, and U.S. Foreign Policy," ran from 25 to 29 June and focused on discussions of health and population, emerging and infectious diseases, food safety, climate change, sustainable development,

biodiversity, and science, technology and commerce. AAAS will be in charge of a second FSI course beginning September 10.

Brett Pomainville, a policy coordinator who attended the course and is preparing for a summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg next year, notes that science was once almost an afterthought at the State Department. He says his colleagues are increasingly aware that they have a lot to learn about the technical aspects of situations that arise in their work.

"Still, it's a struggle for us. But part of a diplomat's job is to learn things quickly and to know who the people are who understand things in depth, and when to call on them for help," Pomainville says.

Because many of the foreign service officers are generalists, it's important to teach them whom to call when they don't have the information they need to respond to a given situation, Fox says. "We teach them what to do when a big issue comes up and when they need to get up to speed quickly."

Perhaps the most visible symbol of the State Department's renewed interest in science and technology is the Secretary of State's new science advisor, Norman Neuriter. Neuriter addressed the participants on the opening day of the course, as did Anthony "Bud" Rock, newly appointed Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES).

"[Neuriter and Rock] confirmed both Secretary of State Colin Powell's interest in science policy, and OES's continuing interest in these issues, especially as new policies develop in areas such as climate change and sustainable development," says Elizabeth Kirk, director of the Europe and Central Asia Program in the Directorate for International Programs and coordinator of the FSI course.

Among the thorniest foreign policy issues are those concerning the 1997 treaty known as the Kyoto Protocol, an effort to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, which the United States has refused to ratify.

To illustrate the full range of the views that can affect foreign policy, participants in the FSI course were divided into seven groups, each of which then met with a representative of a public or private entity that either supported or opposed the accord. In the end, several of the participants seemed to understand that, like any other component of foreign policy, science is also subject to the forces of both politics and public opinion.