

Health news at the national and federal levels

New study group raises Capitol Hill's awareness of public health

WITH the creation of a new bipartisan study group, some federal lawmakers are attempting to increase Capitol Hill's awareness of public health. The new Congressional Study Group on Public Health, launched in February, is a widescale attempt to highlight the role of public health and increase lawmakers' understanding of its importance.

The new group, chaired by U.S. Reps. James P. McGovern, D-Mass., Kay

Granger, R-Texas, and Lucille Roybal-Allard, D-Calif., will sponsor educational briefings on Capitol Hill to inform members of Congress and their staff about the diverse and important work of public health professionals as well as the health protection efforts they undertake.

In a letter introducing the unique, new group to their colleagues in the House of Representatives, McGovern, Granger and Roybal-Allard emphasized their "strong interest" in protecting the health of the American public and urged members and their staff to join the new group.

The landmark initiative has drawn praise from public health leaders, who have promised to support the new effort with their ideas and connections to the public health community.

"The co-chairs of this new study group should be applauded for their strong leadership and foresight," said Evan Jones, chair of the Campaign for Public Health, a non-profit organization of public health and business community lead-

ers advocating for increased federal funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "The Campaign for Public Health looks forward to highlighting the work of these dedicated members of the House on their worthy effort to show how public health impacts our daily lives."

Among the group's goals will be to sponsor bimonthly seminars on a wide range of public health topics. Working with CDC scientists and other public health officials, the group's co-chairs

hope to provide congressional leaders and their staff with a more complete understanding of the many important health protection efforts being undertaken by the federal government.

At the inaugural briefing in March, CDC Director Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH, joined leaders from the public health community and the study group's co-chairs in urging Congress to increase CDC's funding. Gerberding called on the public health community to join together to solve the challenges and problems that confront it.

Joining Gerberding at the event, APHA Executive Director Georges Benjamin, MD, FACP, also called for public health support.

"It is an investment in ourselves, our families and our communities," Benjamin said. "CDC is a very important agency, but we have been talking the talk and not walking the walk in terms of our fiscal dollars."

For more information on the study group, call (202) 225-6101 or (202) 225-5071. ■

— *Teddi Dineley Johnson*



Photo by Olivia Chang, courtesy APHA

Rep. James McGovern speaks at an event introducing the new Congressional Study Group on Public Health.

Fruits, veggies still lacking in most Americans' diets

AMERICANS are not eating enough fruits and vegetables, putting themselves at risk for heart disease, cancer and other health problems, according to a recent federal study.

Published in the March 16 *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, the study found that about 33 percent of the U.S. adult population consumed fruit two or more times daily, and 27 percent ate vegetables three or more times per day. The national Healthy People 2010 objective is for 75 percent of Americans to eat at least two daily fruit servings and 50 percent to eat at least three daily vegetable servings.

"To meet the 2010 national objectives, a more sustained and effective public health response is needed, including continued surveillance, identification of barriers to eating more fruits and vegetables and environmental changes," the study authors stated.

One such intervention, launched in March by the non-profit Produce for Better Health Foundation, is the "Fruits & Veggies — More Matters" campaign, a follow-up to the "5 A Day" awareness program. The campaign, which provides nutritional information, shopping tips and cooking advice, is designed to help boost produce consumption among the general public. The campaign highlights the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which encourages Americans to eat more dark green vegetables, orange vegetables, legumes, fruits, whole grains and low-fat milk and milk products.

The new fruit and vegetable campaign also includes

a "Mom2Mom" message board where mothers recently shared recipes such as veggie milkshakes, ways to sneak vegetables into tried-and-true favorites such as turkey burgers and tips for making fruit fun for kids by serving it in creative ways. Information on how produce consumption can improve health is interspersed online with easy-to-follow tips such as planning meals before hitting the grocery store.

The Produce for Better Health Foundation partnered with the National Cancer Institute in 1991 to introduce the "5 A Day for Better Health" program, which has encouraged behaviors that increase fruit and vegetable intake. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is now the lead federal agency for the program and is also a partner in the new "More Matters" campaign.

Such campaigns are key to upping produce intake among Americans, according to the *MMWR* study, which also tied higher fruit consumption to lower body mass index.

"Nutritional interventions should go beyond increasing individual awareness and target the family, local community and overall society to eliminate barriers to healthy eating, provide support for persons who are making healthy changes, increase resources for populations with greater need and emphasize nutritional policies that have an impact on society," the authors said.

Learn more about the new campaign at www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org. For the *MMWR* study, visit www.cdc.gov/mmwr. ■

— *Donya C. Arias*



Photo by Olga Lyubkina, courtesy iStockphoto

Report calls for incentives to curb antibiotic resistance

MARKET and regulatory incentives are crucial to combating the growing crisis of antibiotic resistance, according to a recent report.

The report, produced by the Washington, D.C.-based Resources for the Future, suggests that medical research may become a victim of its own success by creating drugs that heal millions, yet are rendered obsolete through overuse. Effective solutions to declining antibiotic effectiveness, according to the report, must include financial inducements such as lowering reimbursement for hospital-acquired infections and discouraging inappropriate use of antibiotics by changing how physicians are paid for issuing antibiotic prescriptions and how patients are reimbursed for filling those prescriptions. In addition to financial incentives, regulatory strategies are needed to change incentives for health care providers and insurers.

"Practical economic incentives are a time-tested and powerful way to change behaviors," said Ramanan Laxminarayan, PhD, the report's lead author.

The report was issued as concerns over antibiotic resistance continue to mount. For example, the percentage of U.S. patients with staph infections who failed to respond to the common antibiotic methicillin grew from 2 percent in 1974 to more than 50 percent in 2000.

Yet as antibiotics are growing less effective, fewer pharmaceutical companies are developing new drugs, according to the report, "Extending the Cure: Policy Responses to the Growing Threat of Antibiotic Resistance." Simply offering incentives to drug companies for developing new, more effective antibiotics may not be sufficient, but changing patent rights and marketing practices could help stem the tide of antibiotic resistance.

The report is available from www.extendingthecure.org. ■