

# Initiatives

Developing efficacious strategies for preventing harm and promoting health among youth.



## when "Just Say No" is not enough

By Susan Brandenburg

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There's something positive stirring in the minds and bodies of students in area high schools these days, and according to Chad Werch, PhD, director and principle investigator of the University of Florida's Addictive and Health Behaviors (AHB) Research Institute, it's all the rage.

What is it? A simple list of lifestyle and behavioral questions concerning alcohol and drug abuse posed annually to a random group of teens who have agreed to participate in a short-term, highly successful, research project that encourages a positive approach to reducing negative behaviors.

"Our studies have had extremely positive results," said Werch, who has directed the program since its creation in 2004. Werch described how his team's innovative research projects are significantly reducing adolescent

alcohol, tobacco and drug use while increasing positive factors such as physical activity, nutritional eating, better sleep habits, stress management, self-control, perceived health status and personal goal setting.

"With the project, "Planned Success," we're providing young people individually tailored feedback based on their answers to our brief screening survey," Werch said. "The one-on-one consult with our health interventionist is powerful and effective, and because the program is related to feeling fit, looking good, and setting positive goals for the future, it's well-received."

The image-based messages of the project combine positive messages about personal development with health risk behaviors such as alcohol, cigarette smoking or illegal drug use. By correlating youthful, attractive,

active imagery with healthy behaviors, the reinforcement is motivational and positive.

"This is a very different approach to the traditional dire health risk warnings used in the past to prevent drug and alcohol abuse," said Werch.

The research project begins with a recruitment phase, in which AHB researchers visit local high school. A \$10 stipend is paid to students each time they complete a data collection, such as the initial screening survey and later, a follow-up.

Materials are sent home and parental consent is required for student participation. The questionnaires focus on nutrition, exercise, substance use and goal setting. Information is sent home to parents following the consult, encouraging parent-youth communication regarding fitness promotion and alcohol avoidance.

According to Werch, the total amount of time for student interaction with researchers is approximately one hour. "Over the years, we've heard positive remarks from teachers and counselors that solid improvement was noted", he said.

Werch said the research projects address multiple health concerns. "Not everybody is using substances," Werch said. "But there are some who might be thinking about trying alcohol. For one kid it might be prevention; for others who are in perfect health, it serves as a nice little reminder to keep heading in the right direction."

He said some public health messages in the media can have a negative impact on the type of work he and others with AHB are trying to promote.

*Continued on pg. 2*

## “Just Say No” continued from Page 1

This type of marketing over-inflates the norm," said Werch, who has observed that many students are under the impression that their peers are using drugs when, in fact, most kids don't drink regularly or use drugs. "Kids who are fit, active and popular don't drink - that's the marketing message we want to promote," he said. "Marketers already know how to motivate young people to purchase cereal, clothing, music, cell phones. Why not use these same visually pleasing images to promote good health? It's the packaging with the emphasis on public health information rather than on risks that is actually quite different in a subtle way."

As one of the AHB interventionists, Sue Kreichelt, RN, said the one-on-one consult with students is an invaluable component of the program. While she follows a specific script and the goal is to consistently present the same consultation for research purposes, she says each student is an individual with different perceptions and needs. "Part of the consult is about preparing for and succeeding in life," said Kreichelt.

"In our studies, we've found that it [the research and prevention promotion] does in fact, motivate students," said Werch. "This is an overall, visual self-improvement program that they [the students] respond to because

the core of the message relates to their physical image of themselves."

In addition to research projects led by the AHB Research Institute, a number of other studies have been directed by Mayo Clinic Jacksonville in collaboration with the Institute, primarily examining smoking cessation and tobacco use among young adults.

Last September, UF's AHB Institute, the Mayo Clinic along with the American Academy of Health Behavior, hosted a symposium of information of both scientific and application knowledge for health behavior intervention.

The ultimate goal of the research and the annual symposium, according to Werch, is that these positive programs being researched here and across the country will eventually be identified as national models.

"We are still in the early stages," he said, "but these programs are something that might eventually be used by health teachers, counselors, nurses, and health educators, in written form and on DVDs. It is a unique approach that could have a very important impact on the future of our youth." ■

## hard at work: current research news

The AHB Institute produces many scientific and professional journal articles each year. Below is a sampling of some of the most recent published papers.

**Moore, Michele J., & Werch, Chudley. (2008). Relationship between vigorous exercise frequency and substance use among first-year drinking college students. *Journal of American College Health, 56(6), 686-690.***

**Objective:** The authors explored the relationship between self-reported vigorous exercise frequency and alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use behaviors among first-year college students who self-identified as drinkers. **Participants:** The authors recruited 391 freshman college students in Northeast Florida to participate in an alcohol abuse prevention study. **Methods:** The

authors conducted a multivariate analysis of variance to assess the relationship between vigorous exercise frequency and 6 measures of ATOD use at baseline. **Results:** Frequent exercisers drank significantly more often and a significantly greater quantity than did infrequent exercisers. However, frequent exercisers smoked cigarettes significantly less often than did infrequent exercisers. **Conclusions:** These findings suggest that vigorous exercise frequency is differentially



associated with alcohol and cigarette consumption among college students. Researchers should further examine the reasons for these differences.

**Matthews, Anna E., Werch, Chudley E., & Bian, Hui. (2007). An impact evaluation of two versions of a brief intervention targeting alcohol use and physical activity among adolescents. *Journal of Drug Education, 37(4), 401-416.***

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the immediate impact of two new versions of the Project SPORT program, a brief one-on-one tailored consult addressing alcohol use and physical activity for adolescents. One new version was a brief interactive CD-ROM (Study one) and a second was a brief small group consultation (Study two). In study one, high school students were

exposed to either an interactive CD-ROM consultation or a non-interactive computer program. In study two, students either participated in a small group consultation or health booklet control. These studies suggest both interventions were highly acceptable to participants, however, the new CD-ROM version of Project SPORT had a greater positive effect on females than males. Suggestions to make the CD-ROM more acceptable and effective for males are presented. The small group version of Project SPORT was largely acceptable and potentially efficacious for both male and female adolescents, with the largest impact seen on participants' images, beliefs, and commitment related to physical activity.

**Werch, Chudley, Bian, Hui, Moore, Michele J., Ames, Steve, DiClemente, Carlo C., & Weiler, Robert M. (2007). Brief multiple behavior interventions in a college student health care clinic. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41, 577-585.***

**Purpose:** This study examined the effects of brief image-based interventions, including a multiple behavior health contract, a one-on-one tailored consultation, and a combined consultation plus contract intervention, for impacting multiple health behaviors of students in a university health clinic. **Methods:** A total of 155 college students attending a major Southern university were recruited to participate in a study evaluating a health promotion program titled Project Fitness during the Fall 2005 and Spring 2006. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three treatments as they presented at the clinic: 1) a multiple behavior health contract, 2) a one-on-one tailored consultation, or 3) a combined consultation plus contract intervention. **Baseline and one-month post-intervention data were collected using computer-assisted questionnaires in a quiet office within the student health clinic. Results:** Omnibus repeated measures MANOVAs were significant for drinking driving behaviors,  $F(2,136)$

$=4.43, p=.01$ , exercise behaviors,  $F(5,140)=6.12, p=.00$ , nutrition habits,  $F(3,143)=5.37, p=.00$ , sleep habits,  $F(2,144)=5.03, p=.01$ , and health quality of life,  $F(5,140)=3.09, p=.01$ , with improvements on each behavior across time. Group by time interaction effects showed an increase in the use of techniques to manage stress,  $F(2,144)=5.48, p=.01$ , and the number of health behavior goals set in the last 30 days,  $F(2,143)=5.35, p=.01$ , but only among adolescents receiving the consultation, or consultation plus contract. Effect sizes were consistently larger across health behaviors, and medium in size, when both consult and contract were employed together. **Conclusions:** Brief interventions using a positive goal image of fitness, and addressing a number of health habits using a contract and consultation strategy alone, or in combination, have the potential to influence positive changes in multiple health behaviors of college students attending a university primary health care clinic.

**Glassman, Tavis J., Werch, Chudley E., & Jobli, Edessa (2007). Alcohol self-control behaviors of adolescents. *Addictive Behaviors, 32(3), 590-597.***

**Purpose:** The aims of the present study were to: (1) factor analyze a 13-item adolescent alcohol self-control behavior scale, (2) examine associations between frequency of self-control behavior use and alcohol consumption, and (3) to determine which self-control behaviors best predict alcohol use and consequences. **Methods:** A confidential standardized survey was used to collect data on participant's 30-day frequency, quantity, and heavy use of alcohol; alcohol-related consequences; and alcohol self-control behaviors. **Results:** A principal component factor analysis produced the following three components: Healthy Alternatives ( $* = .81$ ), Self-regulation ( $* = .72$ ), and Assertive Communication ( $* = .73$ ). MANOVAs indicated strong associations

between frequency of use of the three types of self-control behaviors and alcohol consumption ( $p$  values  $\leq .001$ ). Logistic regression analysis revealed that self-regulation behaviors were the best predictor for all alcohol use measures and consequences ( $p$  values  $\leq .001$ ). **Conclusion:** Self-control behaviors differ in their ability to predict alcohol use and consequences. Self-regulation strategies emerged as the most consistent predictor of alcohol use patterns and consequences among adolescents, followed by healthy alternatives.

**Werch, Chudley (2007). The Behavior-Image Model: A paradigm for integrating prevention and health promotion in brief interventions. *Health Education Research, 22(5), 677-690.***

This paper describes the Behavior-Image Model (BIM), an emerging and innovative paradigm for planning brief interventions for adolescents that fuse the prevention of harmful behaviors with the promotion of healthy habits. We discuss the components of the BIM as a new paradigm for creating multiple behavior health interventions, as well as the empirical and conceptual underpinnings of the model, and present Project Sport as an illustration of how the BIM may be applied to construct a brief multi-behavior intervention. The BIM posits that selected salient images of others and ourselves may be used to cast gain- and loss-framed messages coupling and motivating health-promoting and health-risk behaviors within single interventions. This content, in turn, activates prototypes and future self-images through the processes of social and self-comparison, leading to improvements in risk and protective factors and subsequent change in targeted health-promoting and health-risk behaviors. Recommendations are offered for conducting future research integrating health-risk and health-promoting behaviors in both brief and non-brief interventions for adolescents and adults. □

## \$3.2 million grant funds alcohol, fitness interventions for adolescents

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Lans Stout

The AHB Research Institute, part of the University of Florida College of Health and Human Performance, received a \$3.2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) to continue research on alcohol interventions for adolescents. NIAAA will fund the research for the next five years.

Dr. Chad Werch, director of AHB Research Institute and principal investigator, said this study is unique because adolescents from diverse high school settings will receive positive youth development messages along with health risk messages for substance abuse, thus targeting multiple health behaviors during a single, short intervention session.

“This project strives to reduce alcohol abuse and problems among high-risk older adolescents often ignored in prevention research and services,” Werch said.

Some of the problems the intervention study *ACTIVE!* hopes to combat are physical inactivity, alcohol and drug misuse, poor nutrition and lack of sleep, all of which are common issues among today’s teenagers. According to research, more than half of American youth are not physically active on a regular basis. National health data for high school students also show an alarming 25.5 percent of students have been involved in heavy episodic drinking in the past month, according to the Youth Risk Behavior and Surveillance Survey in 2005.

This grant will allow AHB Research Institute to provide a free, activity-based health promotion program for at-risk high school students at various Northeast Florida public schools, Werch said.

Werch said research on an initial intervention titled *SPORT* showed an increase in moderate and vigorous physical activity, and a decrease in alcohol use, heavy

drinking and alcohol problems among participating adolescents.

“Active! is built on years of previous research funded by the NIH,” Werch said. “It is designed to increase physical activity, decrease alcohol use and promote better nutrition and sleep habits.”

The first phase of the program will have students evaluate future intervention strategies for content and design. The next phase will consist of evaluating a 20-minute screen, fitness consultation, and goal plan delivered by computer or a fitness specialist. A third phase will examine a parent-based program delivered by mail to participating adolescents’ homes.

“Our trained intervention staff will provide brief motivational programs addressing a variety of health behaviors including, exercise, eating healthy, resting properly and avoiding alcohol and other drug use,” Werch said.

The project described was supported by Grant Number R01AA009283 from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism or the National Institutes of Health. ☐

### make a gift!

The AHB Research Institute is a non-profit organization. If you would like to help us in our mission, please call 904.281.0726 or email Melissa Wezniak at [mwezniak@hhp.ufl.edu](mailto:mwezniak@hhp.ufl.edu). You may also visit <http://hhp.ufl.edu/heb/ahbri/ahbri.php> for more information. Thank you!

## good work pays off in great ways

The projects led by the AHB Research Institute have impacted the lives of over 2,500 families in the Northeast Florida region. These projects have led to a decrease in the consumption of alcohol, cigarette and illegal drug use, as well as an increase in physical activity, healthy nutrition, sleep, positive self-image and quality of life, for adolescents and young adults. Below are just a few of the many positive comments from adolescents and their parents participating in our projects. ■

**"The topics or information that I liked best about this program was about academic goals and the influence of drugs on future goals."**

**"It helped our family talk about ways we could all get healthier."**

"I liked the information and advice. I think this is wonderful for kids during this age...very good info!"

**"I enjoyed the information on career goals and different ways in which I can reach my goals in a healthy way."**

**"I liked the program materials because ... It was good motivation!"**

"I liked the fact that they continue to help youth and set us in the right direction. I appreciate people taking time out to help and make a difference."

## our collaborators help make it happen!



Thomas Brandon, PhD, (back row, center left) with the faculty and staff of the AHB Research Institute

Recently, Dr. Thomas Brandon, Ph.D., Director of the Tobacco Research & Intervention Program of the Moffitt Cancer Center in Tampa, Florida, visited with the AHB Research Institute. Dr. Brandon is just one of the many talented people to collaborate with the Institute in recent years. He had great things to say about the Institute's mission, goals, and future direction.

"I'd like to begin by conveying my very strong, highly positive impression that I have of AHBRI. In a relatively short period of time at UF, you have built an impressive research organization. You have significant, competitive, extramural research support and a high rate of publication in peer-reviewed

journals. You are conducting socially meaningful research with notable potential for public health impact. You have assembled what appears to be a highly dedicated and competent staff of researchers and support personnel. And you have established a wide range of collaborations with productive researchers in Florida and around the nation. Moreover, you have established and grown the Addictive & Health Behaviors Research conference, which further extends the reach and impact of AHBRI, while also providing a genuine service to the field," says Dr. Brandon.

The AHB Research Institute would like to thank all of its collaborators for their dedication to making our Institute the very best it can be. ■

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## community involvement - giving back

The AHB Research Institute is no stranger to the community. We recognize that not everyone is fortunate enough to have a roof over their heads and a hot meal every night.

In an effort to give back to the community, the AHB Research Institute has recently helped several charitable organizations in their causes.

During the 3rd Symposium on Addictive and Health Behaviors, the Institute raised money to help the Barnabas Center in Fernandina Beach, FL. Over four hundred dollars was donated to this charitable organization.

The Institute also donates food items, dry goods, and cash to selected organizations each Holiday season. Food and cash donations were made to the Beaches Center and the Mission House recently.

Plans are always under way to give to needy Northeast Florida organizations. We are glad to do our part to help others! 🍷

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