I am delighted to share our latest accomplishments through the 2016-2017 Year in Review. Research at the Vermont Center on Behavior and Health, which includes the UVM Center of Tobacco Regulatory Science (TCORS) and the UVM Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE), utilizes the principles of behavioral economics and behavioral pharmacology with a special interest in health disparities and vulnerable populations. As the subsequent pages will attest, we are making great strides toward our mission of becoming a center of research excellence committed to investigating relationships between personal behavior patterns and risk for chronic disease and premature death.

Our studies surrounding unhealthy behavior – tobacco use, physical inactivity and prescription opioid abuse – are impacting scientific understanding and potential clinical treatments of these pressing and expensive public health problems. In the last year alone, our investigators have published more than 50 papers in these subject areas.

To further disseminate the latest research on managing these critical national issues, we collaborate annually with accomplished policy makers and scientists on a special issue of Preventive Medicine, which is published based on selected proceedings from our annual conference.

In addition to our national efforts, we are working on solutions to specific local matters of addiction. We currently are working with the Vermont Department of Health to develop a methodology for measuring and monitoring the size of the opioid user population in the state. Also notable is the fact that some of our investigators have traveled as far as Central America and the Middle East to study behavior and health and, in turn, share their research studies with international colleagues.

In the coming years, and in keeping with our mission, the VCBH intends to increase scientific understanding of the mechanisms underpinning risk behaviors and to create more effective interventions to promote behavior change, especially among the most vulnerable populations. Keep up with our progress on the VCBH website: www.med.uvm.edu/behaviorandhealth.

Sincerely,

Stephen T. Higgins, Ph.D.
Director, Vermont Center on Behavior and Health
Vice Chair, UVM Department of Psychiatry
Virginia H. Donaldson MD ’51 Endowed Professor of Translational Science
The theme of the 2017 Annual Behavior & Health Conference is Tobacco Regulatory Science, with particular focus on vulnerable populations. Regulating the nicotine content of cigarettes and other products is an important responsibility of the FDA that has tremendous potential to reduce smoking prevalence and improve public health. Scholars from leading universities and medical centers share their research and knowledge throughout the 2-day program, October 5–6.

2017 Keynote Speaker: Mitch Zeller, J.D., Director, FDA Center for Tobacco

Mitch Zeller, J.D., became director of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) Center for Tobacco Products (CTP) in March 2013. The mission of CTP—established by enactment of the 2009 Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act—is “to make tobacco-related death and disease part of America’s past, not America’s future. and, by doing so, ensure a healthier life for every American family.”

“Today, FDA has an unprecedented opportunity to use the new tools in the Tobacco Control Act,” Zeller said. “Product regulation is a powerful component of a comprehensive strategy to reduce the death and disease from tobacco use. We will marshal the science to support new policies to help combat the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the United States,” he added.

Mr. Zeller, a graduate of Dartmouth College and the American University Washington College of Law, has been working on FDA issues for more than 30 years. He began his career as a public interest scholar from leading universities and medical centers share their research and knowledge throughout the 2-day program, October 5–6.

Panel on Very Low Nicotine Content Cigarettes

- Reduced Nicotine Content Cigarettes and Use of Alternative Nicotine Products
  - Dorothy K. Hatsukami, Ph.D., Co-Director, Center for the Evaluation of Nicotine in Cigarettes, Forster Family Chair in Cancer Prevention, Professor of Psychiatry, Associate Director, Cancer Prevention and Control, Masonic Cancer Center (MCC)
  - Main Effects & Moderators of Nicotine Content on Smoking Rate & Nicotine Dependence
    - Eric C. Doney, Ph.D., Co-Director, Center for the Evaluation of Nicotine in Cigarettes, Professor, Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, Baptist Cancer Center, Wake Forest
  - Nicotine Content and Addiction Potential of Cigarettes in Vulnerable Populations
    - Stephen T. Higgins, Ph.D., Director, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Virginia H. Donaldson Professor of Translational Science in Psychiatry and Psychological Science, University of Vermont
  - Reduced Nicotine Content Cigarettes in Vulnerable Populations: How Might our Research be Challenged?
    - Jonathan Foulds, Ph.D., Principal Investigator, Penn State Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Professor of Public Health Sciences and Psychiatry, Penn State College of Medicine
  - Effects of Reduced Nicotine Content Cigarettes in Smokers with Mental Health Conditions
    - Jennifer W. Tidey, Ph.D., Project Principal Investigator, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science and Center for the Evaluation of Nicotine in Cigarettes, Professor of Psychiatry and Human Behavior, and Behavioral and Social Sciences, Brown University
  - Smoking among opioid-dependent individuals: Nicotine reinforcement, withdrawal, and response to interventions
    - Stacey C. Sigmun, Ph.D., Project Principal Investigator, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychological Science, University of Vermont

Panel on Tobacco Regulatory Science & Vulnerable Populations

- A Latent Class Analysis of Tobacco Harm Perceptions Among Nationally Representative U.S. Youth
  - Grace Kong, Ph.D., Investigator, Yale Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, Yale School of Medicine
  - Co-occurring Vulnerabilities in Young Adult
    - Andrea C. Villanti, Ph.D., Associate Director, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of Vermont
  - Smoking Among Women of Reproductive Age
    - Sarah H. Neel, Ph.D., Project Principal Investigator, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychological Science, University of Vermont
  - Changing Perceptions of the Relative Harm of e-Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products in the U.S. Population
    - Michael Eriksen, Sc.D., Director, Georgia State University Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Dean & Regents Professor, School of Public Health, Georgia State University
  - Relative Nicotine Dependence Risk of Conventional and Electronic Cigarettes
    - John R. Hughes, M.D., Associate Director, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Professor, Departments of Psychiatry, Psychological Science, and Family Medicine, University of Vermont

The Role of Economics in Determining Product Use

- Jidong Huang, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Division of Health Management and Policy, School of Public Health, Georgia State University

Panel on Challenges/ Potential Benefits of Facilitating Substitution of Non-combustible Products for Conventional Cigarettes Among Persistent Cigarette Smokers

- Harm Minimization and Tobacco Control: Reframing Societal Views of Nicotine Use to Rapidly Save Lives
  - David B. Abrams, Ph.D., Professor, NYU College of Global Public Health, New York University
  - Relative Health Risks of Conventional Cigarettes versus e-Cigarettes
    - Neal Benowitz, M.D., Core Director and Investigator, UCSF Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, UCSF Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Professor of Medicine and Bioengineering & Therapeutic Sciences, University of California, San Francisco
  - Experimental Tobacco Marketplace: Substitutability of e-Cigarette and Conventional Cigarettes
    - Warren K Bickel, Ph.D., Inaugural Holder, Virginia Tech Carilion Behavioral Health Research Holder, School of Health, Georgia State Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, School of Medicine, and Psychology, Virginia Tech University
  - Use of e-Cigarettes Among Pregnant and Non-Pregnant Women of Reproductive Age
    - Allison N Kurti, Ph.D., Investigator, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Vermont Center on Behavior and Health, Department of Psychiatry, University of Vermont
  - Electronic Cigarette Use Among Individuals with Mental Illness
    - Molie E. Miller, Ph.D., Postdoctoral Research Associate, Brown University Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies
  - Searching for Something Safer? Risk Perception and Use of E-Cigarettes Among those who have had a Cardiac Event
    - Diann E. Gaalema, Ph.D., Project Site Director, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor, School of Public Health, Georgia State University
  - Smoking among opioid-dependent individuals: Nicotine reinforcement, withdrawal, and response to interventions
    - Stacey C. Sigmun, Ph.D., Project Principal Investigator, UVM Tobacco Center of Regulatory Science, Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Psychological Science, University of Vermont
**COBRE**

The Center of Biomedical Research Excellence

Our Center of Biomedical Research Excellence (COBRE) project is funded by the NIH’s National Institute on General Medical Sciences (NIGMS). The project focuses on investigating relationships between personal behaviors and risk for chronic disease and premature death. Unhealthy personal behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, physical inactivity) account for 40% of premature deaths in the U.S. annually and substantially increase healthcare costs and health disparities. There is a tremendous need for (a) greater scientific understanding of the mechanisms underpinning vulnerability to these risk behaviors and (b) more effective interventions to promote behavior change. We approach these challenges using the concepts, principles, and methods of behavioral economics and behavioral pharmacology. This effort involves key interdisciplinary collaborations (a) across multiple academic departments and colleges within UVM, (b) with key Vermont community healthcare leaders, and (c) with other universities, including Brown University and University of Kentucky.

An overarching priority of our COBRE project is to support the selection and career development of excellent UVM junior faculty (see sidebar). We support and mentor a maximum of five junior faculty projects at any one time. The COBRE junior faculty, referred to as Project Directors (PIDs), receive generous research funding and mentoring by senior faculty with the overarching goal of having them succeed in obtaining their first NIH independent research grant (R01 or equivalent).

**TCORS**

The UVM Center on Tobacco Regulatory Science

The UVM Tobacco Center on Regulatory Science (TCORS) is one of fourteen such centers in the U.S. that are supported through a cooperative agreement of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act has given the federal government (i.e., FDA) the authority to bring science-based regulation to the manufacturing, marketing, and distribution of tobacco products. UVM and the other TCORS centers will provide scientific expertise relevant to the FDA’s regulatory mission.

UVM’s Center addresses one of the crosscutting and two of the specific research priorities of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Tobacco Products in carrying out its charge of regulating tobacco products. We approach these priorities using the concepts, principles, and methods of behavioral economics and behavioral pharmacology. The Center is located at the University of Vermont but works closely with collaborators and consultants from Brown University, Johns Hopkins University, University of Minnesota, and University of Pittsburgh.

Our crosscutting priority is researching tobacco products in vulnerable populations, including women of childbearing age/pregnant women, individuals with comorbid other substance use disorders, and individuals with comorbid serious mental illness. Each of these populations is at increased risk for tobacco use and dependence and tobacco-related adverse health outcomes. Yet despite these serious vulnerabilities, these populations are typically excluded from tobacco regulatory studies. For the FDA to effectively execute its tobacco regulatory responsibilities, having sound scientific evidence on how new tobacco products impact vulnerable populations is critically important. Our goal is to assist in providing the FDA with that evidence.

Regarding specific priorities, the Center investigates reducing the addiction potential of cigarettes and other tobacco products by reducing their nicotine content and examines the impact of new products on biomarkers of exposure and health outcomes in vulnerable populations. Regulating the nicotine content of cigarettes and other products is an important responsibility of the FDA that has tremendous potential to reduce smoking prevalence and improve U.S. public health.

**FORMER VCBH PRE-DOC AWARDED FDA FELLOWSHIP**

Mollie Miller, Ph.D., a post-doctoral research associate with UVM TCORS at Brown University, has been awarded a Tobacco Regulatory Science Fellowship at the Food and Drug Administration Center for Tobacco Products, Office of Science. Miller earned her Masters and Doctoral degrees in Experimental Psychology from the University of Vermont, where she was pre-doctoral fellow. "I am very excited for the CTP fellowship and it's directly in line with where I hope to take my career," Miller says of the award. "I am also able to remain affiliated with TCORS and the tobacco research community."
Research News

Research on Rising Popularity of Menthol Cigarettes Garners National Attention

Tobacco research done by Andrea Villanti, Ph.D., faculty member with the VCBH and an associate professor in UVM’s Department of Psychiary, is the subject of an article, “Menthol Cig Use Rising in U.S., Especially Among Young,” in the October 17 edition of MedPage Today. The Gupta Guide. Villanti’s study, done with colleagues at the Schroeder Institute for Tobacco Research and Policy Studies, found that more young adult smokers reported favoring menthol cigarettes over the non-menthol kind. Their paper entitled, “Changes in the prevalence and correlates of menthol cigarette use in the USA, 2004-2014,” was recently published in Tobacco Control.

VCBH Researchers Participate in Opioid Panel at Clinton Health Matters Summit

On Monday, April 10, President Bill Clinton and three panelists – including VCBH Research Professor Richard Rawson, Ph.D. – discussed ways to help “Catalyze Solutions to the Opioid Epidemic.” Dr. Rawson is currently working with the Vermont Department of Health on a “Hub and Spoke Model” for addiction treatment in the state. In his remarks at the Summit with the former President, Rawson said the treatment options out there are effective, but sometimes inaccessible. “Treating this is less complicated than treating diabetes, and it’s less complicated than treating many types of cardiovascular disease and hypertension,” he commented. “They are very effective and they are saving thousands of lives; we just need to get people access to these treatments.”

The sixth annual Health Matters Activation Summit focused on creating health equity in the twenty-first century by exploring both national efforts and community-led solutions. Discussions and networking sessions also highlighted opportunities and innovations in health advancement with the country’s leading experts. The Summit took place at the Clinton Presidential Center in Little Rock, Arkansas.

VCBH Investigators Collaborate on “Pay People to Stop Smoking?” Article for The Conversation

VCBH Director Stephen T. Higgins, Ph.D., collaborated with Assistant Professor Allison Kurti, Ph.D., and pre-doctoral fellow Danielle Davis on an article for The Conversation about the efficacy of financial incentives, in the form of vouchers, to promote smoking cessation and other health-related behavior change, especially among vulnerable populations. “Pay People to Stop Smoking? It Works, Especially in Vulnerable Groups,” has since been picked up by multiple national media outlets including Salon.com. Considering that cigarette smoking still kills about 480,000 people in the U.S. annually and five million globally, Higgins explains that “financial incentives to decrease smoking merits serious consideration.” The Conversation article was based on a paper, “Financial Incentives for Reducing Smoking and Promoting Other Health-Related Behavior Change in Vulnerable Populations,” also co-written by Higgins, Kurti and Davis, in Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences.

Vaping & Withdrawal: Exploring Responses to Quitting E-Cigs

“Electronic cigarettes are currently the fastest-growing tobacco harm-reduction product,” says VCBH researcher and Larner College of Medicine Psychiatry Professor John Hughes, M.D., who is leading a new study to determine whether or not stopping e-cigarettes will lead to withdrawal symptoms. Hughes’ lab, in partnership with Battelle Public Health Center for Tobacco Research Laboratory in Baltimore, Md., is in the process of recruiting 120 long-term users of e-cigarettes for the National Cancer Institute-funded study. Screening for participant eligibility is available to Vermont residents through the study’s website.

New England Journal of Medicine Publishes Study on Interim Buprenorphine Treatment for Waitlisted Opioid-Dependent Adults

In many areas of the country, opioid-dependent adults desperate for treatment often find themselves stuck on a wait list, sometimes for months, increasing their risk of continued illicit opioid use, infectious disease, overdose and premature death. A full 96 percent of states in the United States have opioid dependence rates that exceed medication-assisted treatment availability. Stacey Sigmon, Ph.D., an addiction research expert with the VCBH, recently completed a NIDA-funded randomized clinical trial to test a novel “Interim Buprenorphine Treatment” (IBT) regimen for waitlisted opioid-dependent adults. That study demonstrated the initial feasibility and efficacy of IBT in reducing illicit opioid use and related risk behaviors during treatment delays. The results debuted in the New England Journal of Medicine on December 22, 2016 and appeared in newspapers across the United States thanks to media coverage by the chief medical writer at the Associated Press. NEJM metrics show that nearly 20,000 readers have reviewed Sigmon’s study.
VCBH Director Bestowed National 2017 Mentorship Award by CPDD

VCBH Director Stephen T. Higgins, Ph.D., was honored with the 2017 Mentorship Award from the College on Problems of Drug Dependence during the organization’s annual conference in Montreal in June. This award, established in 2000, is given annually to a member of CPDD who has been an exemplary mentor to developing researchers in the field of drug dependence. In their commendation of Dr. Higgins, the award committee said they “admired the impressive caliber of scientists” he’d trained over the course of his career. “We were especially impressed with the admiration and war warm respect that were expressed in the supporting letters,” they added. “Your many contributions to the field of substance abuse research are deeply respected by the committee, as is your service to the College and its members. In short, we believe that you perfectly embody the ideals captured in the CPDD Mentorship Award.”

Mayo Clinic Proceedings’ Article Depicts Ways to Substantially Increase Cardiac Rehab Participation

More than two million Americans experience some type of a cardiac event every year. Whether they’ve had a heart attack or coronary revascularization procedure, such as bypass surgery or coronary stent placement, doctors typically recommended these patients participate in Cardiac Rehabilitation (CR) as outpatients. Despite the proven benefits of increased longevity and reduced hospitalizations with CR, only 20 to 30 percent of eligible patients actually participate. An article published online, November 14, 2016, in Mayo Clinic Proceedings by lead author Philip Ades, M.D., associate director of the VCBH, identifies ways to increase participation rates to at least 70 percent among eligible patients: an outcome that, if adopted nationwide, could save 25,000 lives and reduce hospitalizations by 180,000 annually.

Stacey C. Sigmon, Ph.D., received a $3.7 million grant from the National Institute of Drug Abuse to continue the development and evaluation of a novel Interim Buprenorphine Treatment that leverages pharmacotherapy, state-of-the-art technology and rigorous methodology to bridge existing delays in treatment access.

“In an initial R34 randomized pilot study, we demonstrated reductions in illicit opioid use and risk behaviors among waitlisted opioid abusers receiving IBT. This project will seek to replicate those highly promising initial results while simultaneously evaluating generality of our findings to additional rural settings outside our single UVM academic medical center.”

VCBH Investigator Earns Top College of Medicine Research Award

More than 150 faculty, trainees and staff of UVM’s Larner College of Medicine, attended the inaugural Dean’s Excellence in Research Awards event, titled “Celebrating Excellence in Research,” on November 1, 2016. During the event, Senior Associate Dean for Research Gordon Jensen, M.D., Ph.D., announced that Sarah Heil, Ph.D., VCBH investigator and associate professor of psychiatry, was the winner of the first-ever “Mid-Career Investigator” award.

Highlighted Research Grant Award

We have recently completed studies of whether a) reducing cigs/day without using NRT prompts new quit attempts, b) smoking cessation makes non-drug rewards less rewarding, c) larger amounts of reduction in cigs/day increase the probability of a quit attempt, d) continuing nicotine patches after a lapse reduces the likelihood of a relapse, e) study characteristics influence the estimate of the effectiveness of medications for smoking cessation, f) number of cigs/day varies much in smokers, and g) empathy, working alliance and beliefs about nicotine addiction mediate the effects of behavioral treatments for smoking cessation.

JOHN R. HUGHES, M.D.,
TCORS Associate Director, Professor, Departments of Psychiatry and Psychological Sciences

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My research focuses on nicotine reduction among smokers not ready to quit. Most recently, I have examined the effectiveness of a brief reduction intervention, the dose-response relationship between reducing cigarettes/day and quitting, and mechanisms that mediate reduction’s effectiveness. I am currently conducting my dissertation: a randomized trial to test reducing cigarettes per day versus switching to very low nicotine content cigarettes.

Elias Kiemperer, T32 Predoctoral Fellow

I am currently investigating smoking cessation and psychiatric comorbidities in pregnant and newly postpartum women. This includes examining the impact of our financial incentives treatment on psychiatric symptomatology in addition to examining behavioral economic measures that may capture individual smoking characteristics that make quitting more difficult for some women.

Ivori Zvorsky, T32 Predoctoral Fellow

My current research involves promoting cigarette smoking cessation among socioeconomically disadvantaged pregnant women. As part of this research, I am investigating the utility of the Cigarette Purchase Task (CPT) in characterizing demand for cigarettes for this population.

Tyler Nighbor, Ph.D., T32 Predoctoral Fellow

As a third year Postdoctoral fellow at the University of Vermont, I am working on a randomized comparative effectiveness trial using incentives to promote smoking cessation in disadvantaged mothers of young children. I am also currently leading a manuscript examining the use of home smoking bans over the antepartum and postpartum period among pregnant smokers and the association of smoking bans with nicotine exposure, birth outcomes, and smoking abstinence.

Diana Keith, Ph.D., T32 Predoctoral Fellow

I am interested in substance use disorders and women’s reproductive health. More specifically, I am interested in family planning, contraceptive use, and pregnancy outcomes among women who smoke and among women who receive medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder.

Heidi Melbostad, T32 Predoctoral Fellow

My research involves studying the effects of low-nicotine content cigarettes on the structural and functional neurobiology of individuals from vulnerable populations.

Philip Spechler, TCORS Predoctoral Fellow

As a fourth year graduate student, I am currently investigating how smoking and related behaviors are affected by reducing nicotine content in cigarettes in populations especially vulnerable to smoking. Specifically, I’ve been investigating the interaction between menopausal and nicotine content. In addition to this work, I’ve been investigating the impact that smoking during pregnancy has on food reinforcement using an operant choice task.

Danielle Davis, TCORS Predoctoral Fellow

My research aims to assess the neural and genetic correlates of drug use and psychiatric diseases in adolescents. It also examines the impact of very low nicotine content cigarettes on the brain in the vulnerable. The novel findings provide a better understanding of the neurobiological mechanisms underlying drug dependence and psychiatric diseases.

Bader Chaarani, Ph.D., TCORS Predoctoral Fellow

Using nationally representative data, I am currently working on a project that examines nicotine dependence in smokers who are opioid dependent as well. I have also been doing some secondary analyses based on our recently completed Interim Buprenorphine Treatment pilot study.

Maria Parker, Ph.D., TCORS Predoctoral Fellow

My primary area of research has focused on novel/alternative tobacco products. Most recently I have examined rates and predictors of awareness, perceived harmfuless, and ever use of e-cigarettes among US adults. In a separate line of research, I have investigated the use of alternative tobacco products among cardiac patients.

Irene Pericot-Valverde, Ph.D., TCORS Postdoctoral Fellow

As a fourth year clinical psychology doctoral student working with Stacey Sigmon, my research interests are in better understanding different problematic health behaviors including tobacco and opioid abuse. I work on projects related to the intersection between substance use and psychopathology and tobacco regulatory science-focused projects examining different harm reduction strategies.

Joanna Streck, TCORS Predoctoral Fellow
Assistant Professor Studies Respiratory Health in Belize

Allison Kurti, Ph.D., who joined the VCBH as an assistant professor after completing her post-doctoral fellowship with UVM, recently participated in a service trip to establish mobile medical clinics in and around San Ignacio, Belize. In addition to providing care, the clinics are conducting a field study on air-pollution exposure and the influence of lifestyle on respiratory health and lung function in local adults and children. Kurti joined her sister Stephanie, a human ecologist, on the expedition. “I enjoyed the opportunity to conduct health-related research internationally, in a topic area that was new to me, and with my sister as a collaborator,” Kurti says. The sisters collaborated with other colleagues from the project on a paper, “Air pollution exposure and influence of lifestyle on respiratory health and lung function in Belizean adults and children: A field study,” published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

Former VCBH Postdoc Studies Breastfeeding Incentives with Puerto Rican Mothers

A study on “Incentive-based Intervention to Maintain Breastfeeding Among Low-income Puerto Rican Mothers,” by former VCBH post-doc fellow Yukiko Washio, Ph.D., (now the Director of Implementation and Clinical Research in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Delaware), found that cash incentives significantly increased breastfeeding through 6-month postpartum among WIC-enrolled Puerto Rican mothers. Pediatrics published Washio’s paper, co-authored by VCBH Director Stephen Yukiko Washio, Ph.D., now the Director of Global Health at the University of Delaware, in addition to providing care, the clinics are conducting a field study on air-pollution exposure and the influence of lifestyle on respiratory health and lung function in local adults and children. Kurti joined her sister Stephanie, a human ecologist, on the expedition. “I enjoyed the opportunity to conduct health-related research internationally, in a topic area that was new to me, and with my sister as a collaborator,” Kurti says. The sisters collaborated with other colleagues from the project on a paper, “Air pollution exposure and influence of lifestyle on respiratory health and lung function in Belizean adults and children: A field study,” published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

Local Health

Gaalema Gives Keynote at Heart Association’s “Go Red for Women” Lunch

Dianz Gaalema, Ph.D., VCBH researcher and UVM assistant professor of psychiatry and psychology, gave the keynote address at the American Heart Association’s 10th Annual Vermont Go Red for Women Luncheon in October 2016. Gaalema spoke on “Behavior Change after Major Cardiac Events: Struggles & Strategies.”

Lecture Series

Monthly Lecture Series Brings National Behavior & Health Experts to UVM

The VCBH Lecture Series is a monthly event that brings national and international scholars in the area of behavior, neurobiology, tobacco regulatory science, and health to UVM’s Larner College of Medicine. The invited guest spends a day visiting Vermont and giving a public lecture. Speakers for 2016-2017 include: Steve Ketyian Ph.D., Henry Ford Hospital; Brad Appelhans, Ph.D., Rush University; Michael Toth, Ph.D., UVM Larner College of Medicine; Holly Hagan, Ph.D., New York University; Gordon Jensen, Ph.D., M.D., UVM Larner College of Medicine; Elise Weerts, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University; Neal Cohen, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

VCBH Pre-Doc Helps Brings Counseling to Federal Prisoners in Vermont

As part of a pilot program launched by University of Vermont psychologists, VCBH predoctoral fellow Elisa Klemperer is providing group and individual counseling to inmates in Vermont. The program seeks to prevent relapse and address the mental health issues that plague many criminal defendants. “They’re in this limbo period where they’re not really sure what their future holds, and that can be a great time to change,” Klemperer told local media source Seven Days. “A lot of them have been struggling for a long time. We have this window of opportunity where they themselves are very motivated to show up and engage in treatment.”

VCBH Researchers Studying, Addressing Vermont’s Opioid Crisis

Rick Rawson, Ph.D., a research professor with the VCBH, is collaborating with the Vermont Department of Health on the nature and extent of the opioid problem in Vermont. VTDigger online news reported on the partnership in “Researcher Aims to Give State New Tools to Fight Opiate Crisis,” by Rutland-based journalist Adam Federman. “Rawson cites two key epistemological challenges facing the state: the first is figuring out how many people are dependent on opiates, for which he says there is no solid data. The second is taking a close look at the treatment methods being used and determining if they’re working,” the article details.

VCBH investigator Stacey Sigmon, Ph.D., recently collaborated on a paper about Vermont’s “Hub and Spoke Model” as a “model of care for opioid use disorder.” The paper, co-authored by Vermont physician John Brooklyn, M.D., debuted in the Journal of Addiction Medicine in 2017. Sigmon serves as the director of the Chittenden Clinic, Vermont first and largest opioid treatment program, which currently delivers methadone to approximately 1,000 opioid-dependent residents of the state. Brooklyn serves as medical director of the Chittenden Clinic.
The following publications are representative of VCBH faculty research.


**Klemperer EM**, Hughes JR, Solomon LJ, Callas PW, Finger JR. A randomized controlled trial of motivational and reduction interventions for smokers who are not ready to quit. Addiction. 2017


Higgins ST, Kurti AN, Davis DR. Pay people to stop smoking? It works, especially in vulnerable groups. The Conversation. 2017.


Klempner EM, Hughes JR, Callas PW, Solomon LJ. Working alliance and empathy as mediators of brief telephone counseling for cigarette smokers who are not ready to quit. Psychol Addict Behav. 2017;31(1), 130-35.


Stephen T. Higgins, Ph.D., was elected into the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research.

Andrea Villanti, Ph.D., was awarded the SRNT 2018 Jarvik-Russell Early Career Award, honoring members early in their careers who have made extraordinary contributions to the field of nicotine and tobacco research.

Allison N. Kurti, Ph.D., was recently named an editorial fellow for the journal Drug and Alcohol Dependence.

John Hughes, M.D., was named to the inaugural class of SRNT fellows, conferred in recognition of his outstanding contributions to the field. He also garnered the ATTUD Excellence in Tobacco Treatment, Training, and Advocacy Award last year which subsequently been renamed “The John R. Hughes ATTUD Excellence in Tobacco Treatment, Training, and Advocacy Award.”

Elias Klemperer, predoctoral fellow, was honored by UVM’s Graduate School Senate with the “Most Innovative Research” Award.


In The Media

Psychology Today
A May 8, 2017, explored a lingering question about quality care for those addicted to opioids: VCBH Researcher Richard Rawson, Ph.D., with global experience in treatment, offered his expertise.

Consumer Reports
VCBH Associate Director Philip Ades, M.D., provided his cardiac rehab expertise for a March 24, 2017 Consumer Reports Health article entitled, “What’s Missing from Your Heart-Attack Recovery Plan.”

Associated Press
Research on interim treatment for people on waitlists was picked up by dozens of local and national outlets.

Noteworthy

My research is focused on tobacco use, including young adult tobacco prevention and cessation and translational research to improve tobacco control policy and program decision-making. For the past several years, I have conducted rapid, responsive research to inform tobacco-related policies, particularly the FDA regulation of tobacco products. A focus of my work in this area has been on the disproportionate prevalence of mental and other flavored tobacco product use in young people. My research in young adults also examines social and environmental predictors of tobacco use with the goal of informing effective individual-level and population-level tobacco interventions. To that end, one of my current studies, supported by the COBRE, focuses on improving cessation in socioeconomically-disadvantaged young adult smokers.

ANDREA VILLANTI, PH.D., MPH, Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry

Joanna Streek, predoctoral fellow, received the CPED 2017 Women & Sex/Gender Junior Investigator Travel Award.

Ivori Zvorsky, predoctoral fellow, won the Outstanding Student Poster Award at the ABCT Conference.

Salon.com
Stephen Higgins, Ph.D., VCBH director, authored a commentary piece in “The Conversation” that highlighted the success he and colleagues have achieved in research on the effects of financial incentives in promoting smoking cessation. A number of daily newspaper sites across the country featured his piece, including Salon.com. More than 40,000 viewers clicked on the article.

Fox News Health
Kim Dittus, M.D., Ph.D., VCBH COBRE Project Director, commented on a Danish study of cardiorespiratory fitness and cancer levels in men on December 9, 2016.

MedPage Today
Tobacco research done by VCBH member Andrea Villanti, Ph.D., was the subject of an article in the October 17, 2016 edition of MedPage Today, The Gupta Guide.