

## Research Matters to Parents Matter! Program

ACHRI researchers are investigating ways to treat, diagnose, and prevent pediatric diseases and disorders. Their successes impact children and their families not only in Arkansas but throughout the world. One community-based program that had its beginnings with research conducted at ACHRI is now being implemented by the CDC's Center for Global Health in Africa.

As the physical, social, and economic costs of the AIDS epidemic in the US, particularly among young people of color, mounted in the 1990s, the CDC began to explore new approaches for HIV prevention. In 1999, the CDC requested proposals for family-based prevention programs to reduce high-risk sexual behavior among African American adolescents. From the responses, the CDC funded a proposal submitted by a collaborative partnership of investigators from ACHRI, Georgia State University, and the University of Georgia for the Parents Matter! Program (PMP).

PMP is a community-based intervention designed to promote positive parenting and effective parent-child communication about sexuality and sexual risk reduction with the goal of reducing sexual risk behavior among African American adolescents. Though African Americans represented 15% of the estimated 28 million US adolescents in 2001, they represented 60% of the adolescent AIDS case reported that year. To intervene, PMP offers parents support and guidance in general parenting skills related to decreased sexual risk behavior among youth and sexual communication skills necessary for parents to effectively convey their values and expectations about sexual behavior—as well as critical HIV, STD, and pregnancy prevention messages—to their children.

Dr. Nicholas Long, Section Chief of Psychology, Department of Pediatrics, was a co-principal investigator on the multi-site project. He was the lead researcher in developing the intervention and creating and designing its curriculum. Dr. Long emphasizes that introducing and implementing PMP into the community was an important consideration.

The research team formed community advisory boards (comprised of community members and leaders) early to receive community approval and input. The researchers successfully established and maintained partnerships at all sites to develop, implement, and evaluate the program. Holding sessions at ACH, the Little Rock site exceeded its initial recruitment goal, eventually enrolling 467 families from central Arkansas.

The primary intervention involved five weekly 2½-hour sessions comprised of three components: risk awareness, positive parenting practices, and sexual communication. PMP scheduled single booster sessions at 1 and 2 years afterwards. The study found that participating in the intervention reduced youth sexual risk factors compared to the control group. The strategies used to develop and study PMP were also viewed as a model for other large community-based behavioral studies.

Given the high rates of HIV in Africa, in 2004, the CDC began adapting the program and in the following years implemented and evaluated the program in Kenya. According Dr. Kim Miller, Senior Advisor for Youth Prevention, CDC Center for Global Health, Division of Global



The Parents Matter! Program, originating from a collaboration including ACHRI researchers, is now being used in Africa by the CDC.

HIV/AIDS, "The program met the identified needs of the community—lack of communication between parents and their children, lack of skills to communicate, need for adults to participate in HIV prevention efforts, need for strong adult role models."

As the US researchers did, the CDC had to adapt the program to the target communities. The first cultural modification addressed logistical realities. For example, videos were replaced with audios and key messages were illustrated for a low literate population. Further cultural tailoring of the program content was needed beyond translation: incorporation of specific risk behaviors/drivers of HIV infection, incorporation of local proverbs and songs, and renaming it Families Matter! Program (FMP).

According to Dr. Miller, 50,000 Kenyan families have now participated in FMP. She notes success by how well the program has been received by long waiting lists, excellent retention rates, and the interest of a large number of non-governmental organizations. She adds, "We also have heard directly from parents in the communities—they have told us that the program 'gave us permission to talk' and changed social norms within villages and communities."

CDC is currently implementing FMP in Botswana and Ivory Coast; five other African nations are assessing or implementing FMP. In the US, PMP is being delivered in Washington, DC, by the Department of Health and elsewhere by numerous health departments, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and schools.



Established in 1989, Arkansas Children's Hospital Research Institute provides an on-site research environment for faculty of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences working on the Arkansas Children's Hospital campus. Over 120 pediatric researchers with expertise and experience that span the breadth of medical disciplines comprise ACHRI's roster of investigators who work to fulfill its mission to improve children's health, development, and well-being through high quality research. For more information, visit <http://achri.archildrens.org>.