School of Public Health

Challenge

University of Minnesota **Summer 1989**

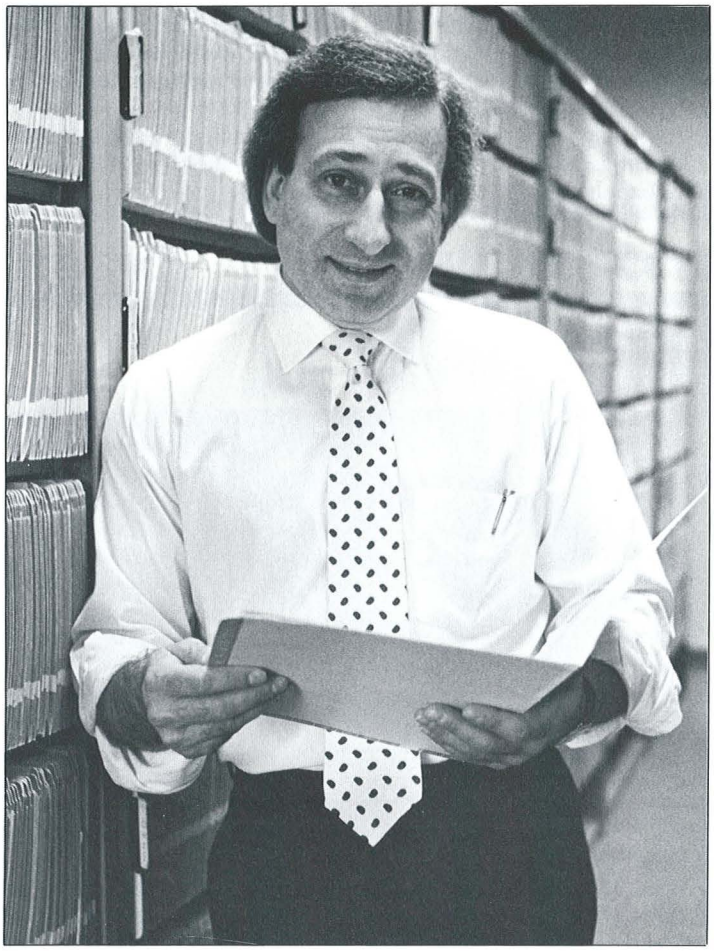
Study Raises Questions About Colorectal Cancer Test

The current do-it-yourself test to screen for colorectal cancer seems, at first glance, like a cancer fighter's dream. Developed in the early 1970s, the test is inexpensive; some organizations even offer it for free. It's simple; the user just smears stool samples on slides and sends them to a laboratory for quick analysis. It's safe, much more so than other means of detecting the disease.

And it's also under intense scrutiny by University researchers who are trying to determine whether the test's true costs and risks outweigh its benefits.

Led by Jack Mandel, an epidemiologist in the Division of Environmental and Occupational Health, a team of researchers from the School of Public Health and the Medical School is concluding a nearly two-decade study of the effectiveness of the fecal occult blood test (FOBT) in preventing deaths due to colorectal cancer. The study is sponsored by the National Cancer Institute. The test, which detects blood in stool samples, has been used extensively as a sort of early-warning system for the disease. But according to Mandel, the principal investigator of a new five-year contract that will wrap up the massive study, "there is no evidence yet" that it actually reduces mortality.

Initiated in 1976 under the direction of Medical School researcher Victor Gilbertsen, the project began as a large-scale effort to search for such evidence.



Epidemiologist Jack Mandel has been keeping tabs on the health of some 46,000 Minnesotans for more than 13 years in search of evidence that mass screening for colorectal cancer helps save lives.

More than 46,000 Minnesotans participated. Subjects were divided into three groups: One was given the stool test annually, a second was given the test every two years, and the third was not screened. Through the course of the study, researchers have followed the participants in search of some indication that screening saves lives.

"For the test to be effective, it must result in a significant decline in colorectal mortality in people who are screened," Mandel says. "After 13 years, we still have not seen this decline."

Despite the lack of evidence of its effectiveness, the perceived low cost and low risk have led many—including the American Cancer Society—to conclude that the FOBT is still worth taking. Some 62,000 Americans die each year of colorectal cancer, the second most common cancer in the country. Just over half of those diagnosed survive at least five years, but if the cancer is discovered in its early stages, that figure jumps to 87 percent. This understandably puts high value on having a means of early detection, and to many the FOBT is just that. But Mandel is not so sure.

"It's inexpensive and easy from the consumer's standpoint. But [in reality] this is not a simple, inexpensive test as promoted," he says.

The problem, Mandel explains, is that blood shows up in stool samples for a number of reasons—from too much aspirin to hemorrhoids. In fact, only from 2 to 3 percent of those with a positive FOBT actually have colorectal cancer. That means that virtually all of those undergoing further testing (the recommended follow-up is a costly and not risk-free procedure called a colonoscopy) don't really benefit from the procedure.

"The main reason we don't want to do [the test] unnecessarily in the case of false positives is because colonoscopy, although very safe, does have some complications, it has some expense associated with it, and there's some discomfort and inconvenience to the patient," says John Bond, the co-

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New Degree Program Combines M.H.A., M.B.A.

A dual degree program combining the master's in hospital administration (M.H.A.) and the master's in business administration (M.B.A.) degrees was offered for the first time during the 1988–89 academic year. The program is a cooperative effort between the School's Program in Hospital and Health Care Administration and the University's Carlson School of Management.

In the past, students were able to enroll in both degree programs independently, but the two degrees took up to twice as long to complete as the conventional two-year M.H.A. program. The new arrangement allows students to complete both degrees in two to 2 1/2 years, reducing the cost and time commitment.

The program enrolled four students in its first year and is expected to attract eight to 10 students annually. For more information, contact Rose Gregoire, School of Public Health, Box 97 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. S.E., University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

Faculty Receive Top MPHA Honors

Lee Stauffer (left) and Conrad Straub

Lee Stauffer, health services administration, and Conrad Straub, environmental and occupational health, were honored at the Minnesota Public Health Association (MPHA) annual meeting last spring.

Stauffer, chair of the public health administration major, received the Minnesota Public Health Achievement Award, given annually to the person who best exemplifies MPHA's mission to promote and protect the health of individuals, families, and the community. In presenting the award, association representatives cited the far-reaching impact Stauffer has had on the public health profession in Minnesota and throughout the country because of his educational efforts and the leadership he has provided to professional associations.

Straub, professor emeritus and former director of the environmental health program, was presented with the Harvey G. Rogers Award for promoting public health in Minnesota through the preservation of a quality environment. Straub is a national expert on the public health implications of water supply, sewage treatment, and environmental radioactivity. He has written more than 150 articles and six books on the subjects.

SPH Staff Honored

Eight of the Outstanding Achievement Award winners gathered to celebrate the honor.

Forty-two School of Public Health employees were honored at the annual staff association awards ceremony in May.

Outstanding Achievement Awards were presented to Marilyn Eells, Veronica Hill, Brian Laing, Mary Ohm, Judy Peterson, Lorraine Robinson, Vony Savelkoul, Mary Patricia Snyder, Virginia Sykes, and Karen Virnig. The awards recognize contributions beyond regular duties in such areas as contributing to fulfilling the School's mission; providing creative solutions to work-related issues; developing time- or money-saving techniques; demonstrating outstanding public relations or interpersonal skills; demonstrating commitment to staff development; and showing consistently strong effort in meeting goals and deadlines.

Years of Service Awards were presented to the following individuals:

Kathy Buxton, Sally Consolati, Linda deBoef, Frank Edwards, Roberto Galaviz, Andrew Halper, Patrick Huttner, Marilyn Hyatt, Roxane Joyce, Peg Kasson, Carol Overby, Marsha Reinking, Sally Schakel, Linda Schmid, Mary Kay Schramm, Helen Voelker, Gordon Weil, and Janet Whitbeck (five years); William Baker, Deborah Durkin, Deborah Engelhard, Nancy Hall, Elizabeth Jeffrey, Chery Knaeble, Marsha McDonald, Sally Miles, Ann Mulally, Lynne Scalzo, and Marilyn Zappia (10 years); Gail Dolliff and Merrie Harrison (15 years); Marilyn Eells (20 years).

Committee Recommends Changes for Public Health Nursing Program

A public health nursing program involving both the School of Public Health and the School of Nursing would make best use of the resources of the two schools and respond to current and future health care needs, a seven-member task force concluded in a report issued in April.

The committee, which was formed last fall to develop a proposal for a new program in public health nursing, recommended that the two schools jointly offer a master's degree program focusing on public health and community health nursing. Courses dealing with population-based public health nursing would be taught through the School of Public Health, while more community-oriented and clinically focused classes would be offered by the School of Nursing. The program's administrator would hold a joint appointment in both schools.

The reevaluation of the current program comes in response to a 1988 recommendation by the University's Advisory Task Force on Planning to eliminate the public health nursing major as part of University-wide changes under its Commitment to Focus effort.

The committee's report has been reviewed by health sciences administrators and the deans of the two schools, who are now working on implementation plans.

Division of Biometry Renamed

In order to better represent the nature of the program, the Division of Biometry has changed its name to the Division of Biostatistics. The move actually is a reversion to an earlier name, which was used until the mid-1960s. In conjunction with the name change, B.S., M.S., M.P.H., and Ph.D. degree programs will now be offered in biostatistics.

New Study Addresses Teens and STD

Do sexually active teens worry about getting AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases? Do they bother to do more than worry—or do they simply believe, "It can't happen to me"? What can be done to stem the rising rate of sexually transmitted disease (STD) among young people?

Michael Resnick, associate professor of health services administration, hopes to answer such questions in a new three-year, interdisciplinary study of adolescent health beliefs, behaviors, and STD. The research is funded by the National Institute on Child Health and Human Development.

Resnick and co-investigators Gary Remafedi of the Department of Pediatrics and Linda Bearinger of the School of Nursing will document the health beliefs, sexual behavior, and incidence of STD in some 1,000 Twin Cities adolescents. The researchers will then assess the teens again after a year to identify the extent to which health beliefs predict whether an individual will become infected, as well as how having been diagnosed with an STD affects subsequent sexual behavior.

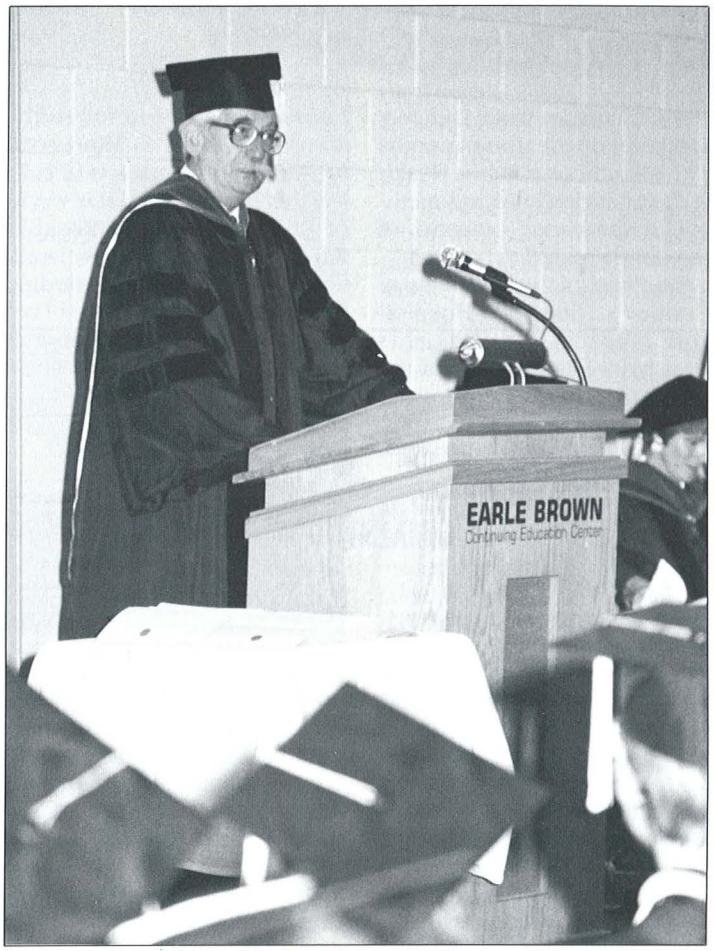
"Alarm continues to grow over the escalating rates of adolescent STD, including HIV and AIDS," Resnick says. "This study has the potential to allow us to predict which adolescents are at highest risk and understand how to intervene early enough to help reduce this public health threat to youth."

Student Hosts TV Show

A live cable TV forum on health issues created and moderated by Harry Krulewitch, an M.P.H. student in the public health administration major, airs in the Twin Cities area on Channel 6 from 9 to 10 p.m. the fourth Monday of each month.

The call-in show, "Medical Journal," features community health leaders and providers discussing topics such as communities' responses to AIDS, legislative issues affecting the elderly, and the role of hospices in health care. It is produced by the Northwest Community Television Corporation.

Commencement 1989



Richard Remington, distinguished professor of preventive medicine and environmental health at the University of Iowa, spoke to graduates and guests on "A Future in Public Health" at the School's commencement June 10. More than 175 graduates were honored at the ceremony, which was held at the Earle Brown Continuing Education Center in St. Paul.

Blackburn Named to Mayo Chair

Henry Blackburn, head of the Division of Epidemiology, was named to the School's Mayo Chair in Public Health beginning April 1.

Blackburn, who has served as division director since 1983 and as a faculty member since 1956, has worked extensively in the areas of chronic disease epidemiology, disease prevention/health promotion, and preventive cardiology. He also holds an appointment in the Medical School.

The Mayo Chair was established in 1984 with contributions from the Mayo Foundation endowment fund, the Mayo Foundation, and the School. It is named for Charles and William Mayo, who were noted for their active interest in and support of public health education. Its purpose, according to SPH Dean Robert Kane, is "to recognize an academic scholar who has made and will continue to make significant contributions to public health."

Scottish Visitor Studies Long-Term Care

A geriatrician from Dundee, Scotland, spent three months with the School of Public Health this past spring studying methods of measuring outcome of care for the elderly.

Ian Philp, of the University of Dundee's Ninewells Hospital and Medical School, was awarded a fellowship from the British Geriatric Society and the Nuffield Foundation for study abroad. He came to Minnesota on the recommendation of colleagues familiar with the work of Robert Kane and Rosalie Kane dealing with age-related health issues. The knowledge he takes back to Scotland will be used to improve research and practical management in geriatric care.

ALUMNI NEWS

• **Erik Bjelke** (Ph.D., epidemiology, 1973) has been named director of the new Center for Epidemiologic Research at the University of Bergen, Norway.

• **James Glosser** (M.P.H., epidemiology, 1971) is administrator of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Glosser also has served as veterinary epidemiologist with the U.S. Public Health Service, Centers for Disease Control.

• **Souhail Massouh** (M.S., environmental health, 1954) sends greetings from the Lebanese Ministry of Health in Beirut, Lebanon, where he is a public health engineer. He reports a critical shortage of environmental health workers in the area due to the ongoing civil war, but notes efforts by the World Health Organization to improve the situation.

Keep the School and fellow classmates updated by sending news about yourself or other alumni to Challenge, *University of Minnesota School of Public Health, Box 197 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455.*

FACULTY NEWS

• **Mila Aroskar**, associate professor of health services administration, presented the keynote speech "Development of Ethics in Nursing" at an ethics and nursing practice conference held by the University of Maryland School of Nursing in April.

• **Patricia McGovern**, instructor in environmental and occupational health, was one of three coauthors who received the Golden Pen VII Award for excellence in writing at the American Occupational Health Conference in Boston last spring. The award is given annually to an outstanding author or authors published in the *American Association of Occupational Health Nurses Journal*. The two other recipients were Jean Bey and Mary Foley.

• **Rebecca Mullis**, assistant professor of human development and nutrition, has been named to a nine-member federal dietary advisory committee. The committee, appointed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health and Human Services, is responsible for reviewing the 1985 federal Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

• **Chap Le** (biostatistics) and **Jack Mandel** (environmental and occupational health) were promoted to full professor, effective July 1. Promoted to associate professor were **Aaron Folsom** (epidemiology), **Susan Gerberich** (environmental and occupational health), and **Phyllis Pirie** (epidemiology).

Test
Continued from page 1

principal investigator and director of the clinical portion of the study.

This is not to say that the test is inappropriate when administered on a case-by-case basis at the recommendation of a physician, Mandel cautions. But attempts to tout it as a safe and easy method of screening large groups of people may be misdirected if in reality the test, when arbitrarily administered, doesn't affect the death rate.

"Even though the complication rate [from follow-ups] is very low, it would be unnecessarily high if the benefit [from the FOBT] is zero," he says.

As Mandel begins his tenure as head of the study, he has high praise for the support the research has received. "We have received tremendous cooperation from individuals, physicians, and hospitals," he says. "This has added significantly to the quality of the study. Minnesota is a wonderful state for health research. People are so willing to participate."

In addition, he commends the way the grant is being administered. Although it is formally housed in the Medical School, the two schools have agreed to share grant revenues. "It's a big contract," Mandel says. "I think it's very significant that two major schools within the University are collaborating on this effort. That really opens the way for future collaborations."

CHALLENGE

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