“Chronic Diseases” Focus of Rural Telehealth Conference

Childhood and adult obesity...nutrition management...wound healing...disease prevention...patient compliance and motivation–these are just some of the topics presented during the Third Annual Rural Telehealth and Advanced Technologies Conference: Managing Chronic Diseases held on September 8 on the campus of Saint Francis University. Over 140 healthcare professionals and allied health students attended the conference.

The keynote speaker at this year’s event was Tatiana Zenzano, MD, MPH, a Luther Terry Fellow in Preventive Medicine and Senior Clinical Advisor at the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in Washington, D.C. In addition, nine other speakers presented during seven plenary sessions, including: James Osborn, MS, (pictured top), Executive Director, Quality of Life Technology Center, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA; Regina Kupchella, MD, FAAP, (pictured middle), Pediatrician, Pediatric Care Specialists, Johnstown, PA; and Stephanie Fonda, PhD, (pictured bottom), Senior Scientist, Diabetes Institute, Walter Reed Health Care System, Washington, DC. Based on their credentials and participation in the sessions, conference attendees had the opportunity to earn up to eight contact hours of continuing education units.

Conference organizers would like to thank all of the presenters for their informative presentations and for the time they devoted to making this year’s conference a success.
Cancer Conference Educational and Entertaining

Nearly 60 people attended CERMUSA's inaugural Rural Conference for Cancer Survivors held on August 13 at the DiSepio Institute for Rural Health and Wellness located on the campus of Saint Francis University.

The conference, which was meant to be an informative, relaxing day for cancer survivors and their family, friends, and advocates, featured twenty-eight informational display tables and three interactive educational sessions with guest speakers.

Patricia Findley, DrPH, MSW, LCSW, assistant professor at Rutgers University’s Graduate School of Social Work, and David Russell, M.Ed., family counselor and certified Laughter Yoga Leader and founder of the Three Rivers Laughter Club, were the guest speakers. Ms. Findley (pictured above, bottom left), whose husband is a cancer survivor, spoke about the book she co-authored, The Cancer Survivor’s Guide: The Essential Handbook to Life After Cancer, and discussed a 7-step program she developed that helps cancer survivors navigate the healthcare system. Mr. Russell spoke about the practice of Hasya yoga and his work with cancer patients, and engaged the audience in a demonstration of laughter yoga.

Conference organizers were very pleased with the positive comments they received from attendees. “The conference was very informative and well organized. It was very helpful seeing and hearing all the survivors’ life/cancer experiences,” said one attendee. “Excellent speakers and showcase of information tables were very good,” another person commented.

Camp Focuses on Health Careers

CERMUSA staff participated in the Southcentral Pennsylvania Area Health Education Center’s 13th Annual Health Careers Awareness Camp held July 10 - 15 on the campus of Saint Francis University. Area high school students interested in a career in healthcare were eligible to participate in this event.

The camp featured classroom learning, tours and speakers, and team events that allowed students to explore a variety of healthcare careers. CERMUSA staff gave interactive presentations on percussion instruments and techniques (used with individuals diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder), a variety of assistive technologies, and medical simulation. At left, students experience “hands-on” interaction with a medical simulator located in CERMUSA’s John P. Murtha Rural Telehealth Research Center laboratory.
“Necessity is the mother of invention.”-- Plato

“I get by with a little help from my friends.”-- Paul McCartney

“If we put these thing-a-ma-jigs and gizmos together in the right order, this might just work.”-- Kent Tonkin

It’s not often I get to start off a tech column with a Greek philosopher, a rock and roll poet, and, well, let’s say the words of someone SLIGHTLY less inspired. My point in these quotations is that sometimes it takes the right combination of technology, people, and optimism to take a project from an abstract idea to physical reality.

CERMUSA recently had an opportunity to bring a concept to fruition, thanks to the hard work and vision of a few key individuals. Earlier in the year, we were approached by our colleagues at the Monmouth Rapid Response Institute (RRI) to tackle a problem involving disaster management. RRI, a first responder/disaster management research agency, had heard from local law enforcement about the difficulties being experienced by first responders in completing initial damage assessments at disaster scenes. Immediately following a natural or man-made disaster, first responders complete paper-based “windshield assessments” in order to document the damages/casualties that have occurred in a given area or neighborhood. The problems associated with these assessments: after being completed, these assessments have to be manually entered into a computer system (i.e. NOT real time) and they tend to “become lost in a sea of paperwork” (i.e. they ARE paper!).

CERMUSA’s Senior Programmer, Mike Shanafelt, believed this was a project that he could successfully take on with the right help. Mike approached the Chair of Saint Francis University’s (SFU) Computer Science Program, Dr. Dan Wetklow, with a proposal to use SFU students to assist in creating an automated method of completing these assessments. Dr. Wetklow saw the project as holding value both to first responders and to students, who could ultimately gain real-world experience from participating in such an endeavor. Within a few days, Dr. Wetklow provided two students and a funding endowment to begin the work.

Under Mike’s and Dr. Wetklow’s mentorship, along with guidance from retired Oceanport, NJ, Police Captain Buzz Baldanza, our two student interns, Kevin Richardson and Aaron Vizzini, began work on a Preliminary Damage Assessment Reporting (PDAR) tool. They rapidly developed a series of system prototypes including a PHP-based web portal and an iPad data entry system. By using commercial-off-the-shelf hardware and standard programming languages, the group quickly created a working model that enabled an end user to perform a scene assessment with an iPad, complete with photos and GPS coordinates, and make this information available to a centralized control center almost instantly. Complete development time for this entire project was just over four months!

Mike and Aaron presented the PDAR to the RRI in August 2011 to rave reviews. Currently, CERMUSA is in the process of exploring potential funding streams and commercial outlets for this application. This project is an excellent example of the creative solutions that can be achieved with minimal funding when the right team is assembled to tackle a problem. In this case, two SFU undergraduates, combined with skillful mentoring and adequate resources, were able to create an elegant solution to a far-reaching problem.

In closing, I salute the efforts of Kevin and Aaron in their diligence in completing this work and the wisdom of Buzz, Mike, and Dr. Wetklow in bringing forth the best in our young colleagues. It is truly amazing what we can accomplish “with a little help from our friends.”
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Wednesday, November 2 • 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
NTSS - 727 Goucher Street, Johnstown (Hiram G. Andrews Center)
More Info: (814) 472-3389 or www.cermusa.francis.edu/atexpo

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• The Ethics of Diversity in Healthcare
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• Using Percussion for Communications and Socialization
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*Cost: $15 per 1.25 CE credit/hours or earn all 5.0 CE credit/hours for $50!
Registration: www.cermusa.francis.edu/atexpo (preferred), or register at Expo.

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