

Gerontology expert joins NMSU

Wagner is Health and Social Services associate dean



Bob Nosbisch
Getting the Word Out

Americans are living longer than ever. In 2005, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the average life expectancy of an American was 78 years.

At the time of that report, the U.S. lagged behind Japan, Italy and Andorra, three nations with life expectancies exceeding 80 years. Zimbabwe occupied the other end of the spectrum.

In that country, the average life expectancy was 36 years, according to the World Health Organization.

From 1955 to 2005, the average life expectancy in the U.S. steadily rose. The CDC report says, on the average, Americans lived 69 years in 1955 and 76 years in 1995.

Statistics show that the 2005 death rate, which was adjusted for age, fell to an all-time low. Fewer than 800 deaths per 100,000 people were reported that year.

"This report highlights the continued reduction in deaths from the three leading killers in the United States – heart disease, cancer and stroke – which is most likely due to better prevention efforts and medical advances in the treatments of these diseases," said Hsiang-Ching Kung, a survey statistician at the CDC and one of the report's authors.

The death rate from heart disease was 217 per 100,000 people in 2004. The following year, it was 210.3 per 100,000 people. Cancer deaths fell from 185.8 per 100,000 people in 2004 to 183.8 per 100,000 people in 2005. Deaths from stroke dropped from 50 per 100,000 people in 2004 to 47 per 100,000 people in 2005.

"If death rates from certain leading causes of death continue to decline, we should continue to see improvements in life expectancy," Kung said.

As people live longer, interest in the field of gerontology grows. Dictionary.com defines gerontology as "the branch of science that deals with aging and the problems of aged persons."

The New Mexico State University College of Health and Social Services recently hired Dr. Donna Wagner, a gerontology expert with years of experience in the field, to serve as associate dean of academic affairs. Wagner also will stay involved with social work teaching and research.

Wagner comes to NMSU from Towson University in Maryland. As the founding director of that university's gerontology program and as a tenured professor of health science and gerontology, Wagner also directed an undergraduate and a master's degree program in applied gerontology.

"My ongoing research agenda has focused on the intersection of caregiving and work, community-residing elders, aging policy and community planning," Wagner said. "Currently, I am completing, with a co-author, a textbook for undergraduates about the Aging Network and developing a policy paper relating to older family caregivers. After the textbook is complete, my next project is a text on planning for healthy, aging communities."

Wagner's three most recent co-authored publications are "The Aging Network: Programs and Services," "Informal Caregiving by and for Older Adults," and "Living Well in Maryland: An Evaluation Report."

Outside of academia, Wagner has served as vice president for

Research and Development of the National Council of the Aging, working with such agencies as the Veterans Administration, National Association for Area Agencies on Aging, and American Society on Aging. Through this collaborative effort, the National Alliance for Caregiving was designed and developed.

Wagner also has conducted advocacy research in partnerships with nonprofit advocacy organizations. Because of her extensive experience, she has been asked to give testimony to the U.S. Senate, speak at Congressional briefings and develop publications to teach social service professionals about issues in their practice.

Wagner earned her Ph.D. in urban affairs at Portland State University in Oregon.

Bob Nosbisch is a senior program specialist in the College of Health and Social Services at NMSU.

“My next project is a text on planning for healthy, aging communities.”

DONNA WAGNER,
NMSU College of Health
and Social Services

Medicaid

Continued from page D1

Medicaid basics

The facts are these. The program's costs have been rising for years, with New Mexico's spending on the program expected to increase to more than \$850 million for the year that starts July 1, or slightly above this year's funding levels. That's because both Gov. Susana Martinez and the Legislature's budget arm, the Legislative Finance Committee, have recommended replacing the \$300 million or so of federal Medicaid aid that is disappearing for next year.

Medicaid spending will represent nearly 16 percent of the \$5.4 billion state budget.

In some ways, Medicaid is a catchall program for the poor.

Children make up more than half of the individuals covered by the program – 332,000 in June 2010, according to the LFC. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of the state's low-income adults have their prescription drugs costs paid, their vision and hearing checked and some – parents of young children at risk for development disabilities – are notified of potential developmental problems after their children are tested.

"When very young children don't get the support they need, they don't realize their potential," said Susannah Burke, executive director of PB&J Family Services, whose agency worked with 1,400 families last year thanks in part to Medicaid funding.

Burke worries about what cuts to Medicaid would mean for the families her agency serves.

Without the needed support, "They are on track for poor physical outcomes, for poor emotional outcomes, on track for poor educational outcomes. These are things we can prevent," she said.

Adult services come up for possible cuts

So far, it appears no one is proposing cuts to Medicaid funding for children. The LFC has

Friday, January 21, 2011

recommended eliminating several adult services – vision care, physical and occupational therapy and hearing services.

Also up for discussion is charging premiums to certain low-income adults participating in New Mexico's State Coverage Insurance program, which is funded by Medicaid.

The LFC budget proposal also assumes additional savings by Martinez's administration once they identify other efficiencies.

The proposed cost-saving measures have led to concerned murmurings among advocates and some state lawmakers who worry about how the cuts will play out in people's day-to-day lives.

"I guess you could call them optional," Sireesha Manne, a staff attorney at Albuquerque-based New Mexico Center on Law and Poverty, said of the LFC's proposed budget cuts. "But from our perspective they are medically necessary."

Vision care, physical therapy and hearing services aren't on a list of mandatory services the federal government requires states to cover.

Neither is dental care. They are "optional," Feldman said.

"We have a lot of optional benefits that we provide that are optional in name only."

Dental care, for example, "is the canary in the coal mine. It is an indicator of premature birth," the Albuquerque senator said.

"Is that penny wise and pound foolish" to cut dental care, Feldman asked, although dental care doesn't appear to be targeted. "Or is that a valid cut?"

Sen. Gay Kernan, R-Hobbs, seemed to capture the dilemma that state lawmakers might find themselves in starting today.

"We expanded, and now it's very difficult to pull back after people have been on these services," Kernan said of previous years when New Mexico was flush with money and expanded Medicaid. "I appreciate that there's great need out there. We want to protect Medicaid as well as education. That's the general consensus. But if there's no money ..."

Kernan didn't finish the sentence. It's up to the Legislature to finish that thought.

THE **MASSAGE CLUB**

Offered Feb 7-19

Call now to reserve!
Valentine's Special

One Hour Couples Massage with chocolate-covered strawberries and sparkling refreshment. **\$80**

575-522-7073 • 115 Roadrunner Pkwy., Ste. 1 near the intersection of Lohman

Accepting New Patients
Veronica Imoisi, MD

- Family Medicine
- Urgent Care with Extended Hours
- Women's Health
- Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine
- Geriatrics

Open Mon.-Sat. 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

HILLRISE MEDICAL CENTER URGENT CARE

All Insurance Accepted • Walk-ins Welcome
575-521-4500 • 1005 S. Telshor #A (near Mesilla Valley Mall)

Call today to set your appointment for a **FREE hearing evaluation**

Ray Bamberg, BC-HIS

HEAR ON EARTH
920 N. Telshor • Las Cruces, NM 88011
(575) 526-EARS (3277)

AUDIBEL
Mon.- Fri. 9am-5pm
www.hearonearthnm.com

Living up to our name...

BRILLIANT Healthcare Management, LLC

Medical Billing & Practice Management

Advanced **MR**®

1161 Mall Dr. Suite D. Las Cruces, NM 88011
(575) 993-5225

OBSESITY DISEASE CENTER

Weight Loss Seminar
Every Wednesday,
6 to 7:30 p.m.

255 W. Hadley #6, Las Cruces

Call 575-524-0777 or email:
info@obesitydiseasecenter.com
www.obesitydiseasecenter.com

Las Cruces LLC
Family Medicine

2930 Hillrise Dr. #2 • Las Cruces, NM 88011 • 575.532.1111

Accepting New Patients

- Pediatrics, Adolescent, Adult, and Geriatrics
- All Insurance Accepted
- Walk-ins Welcome

Imran Raza, M.D., MPH

575-532-1111
Open 8 am - 5 pm • Monday - Friday