Study examines attitudes toward abortion by parents of children with CF

The majority of parents of children with cystic fibrosis (CF) would not abort a second fetus diagnosed prenatally with the disease, according to a study in the American Journal of Public Health. The finding may partially explain why so few parents of children with cystic fibrosis have had prenatal testing.

The study, conducted at the School of Public Health, is part of a larger one on the psychosocial factors affecting the use of prenatal testing for CF. It is the first to look at attitudes toward abortion in a wide range of situations among parents of children with disabilities.

CF occurs once in every 2,000 to 3,000 births. While CF, which affects the lungs and digestive system, shortens life expectancy, it does not cause severe physical or mental disability. Although DNA prenatal testing for CF began in 1985, and a 1983 study had suggested that parents of children with CF would take advantage of it, by 1987 few had.

To learn why, SPH researchers asked 395 parents with CF about their attitudes on abortion in 23 situations. The major finding was that 80 percent would not abort a fetus with CF, but most felt others should have the right to do so. The most important variables related to abortion for CF were attitudes of spouse, siblings and CF doctors and frequency of attendance at religious services.

“What this may mean is that parents of children with CF don’t feel abortion is the appropriate way of avoiding the birth of another child with CF, thus explaining why few have sought prenatal testing,” said Dorothy Wertz, Ph.D., a research professor of public health. “It may also mean that these parents, having lived with a child with CF, are willing to cope with the possibility of another and are optimistic about their children’s futures.”

Wertz added that these findings suggest that many parents of children with CF may not be receptive to efforts to promote prenatal testing for CF, and that money and efforts might be better spent on improved therapy for the disease.

SPH researchers begin largest study ever on aquatic activities and behaviors

Researchers at the School of Public Health have begun the largest and most comprehensive study ever conducted on aquatic activities and behaviors, including alcohol consumption. Each
year, approximately 8,000 Americans drown, and although experts estimate that between 25 and 50 percent of these deaths involve alcohol consumption, there is very little data available on exactly how drinking and other factors contribute to these deaths.

"Even though there is reason to suspect that alcohol's impairment of sensory, cognitive and motor skills has a direct causal relationship to drowning, we are not just looking at alcohol consumption specifically," said Jonathon Howland, Ph.D., an associate professor of public health. "We are also looking at a whole range of factors that—along with alcohol—might contribute to deaths or accidents near the water."

For example, the study will examine the possible reasons for a greater number of male versus female drownings. "Statistics indicate that after the age of two, boys and men are more likely to drown than girls or women, but we don't know why," said Howland. According to Howland, the study will answer such questions as: do men engage in more dangerous activities near the water than women; are women better swimmers than men; do men go beyond their limits and take more risks than women; and do women drink less than men around the water.

One purpose of the study is to provide accurate information to the Coast Guard and state officials. "Such information will be useful to policy-makers for deciding how resources should be allocated between enforcement, training and public education," said Howland.

Arthritis Foundation presents awards to six Medical Center investigators

Six faculty members at Boston University School of Medicine recently received research grants from the Arthritis Foundation. According to Robert Meenan, M.D., an associate professor of medicine and head of the University Hospital's arthritis section, the grants total approximately $225,000.

Receiving a third-year clinical science grant was David T. Felson, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine and public health, for his research project titled "Knee Bending: Habitual Physical Activity and Knee Osteoarthritis." Paul R. Meers, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pathology, received a third-year arthritis investigator award for his research project titled "Annexins in Neutrophil-Mediated Inflammation." His sponsor is Alfred Tauber, M.D., a professor of medicine and pathology. Martha Skinner, M.D., a professor of medicine, received a second-year clinical science grant for "Treatment of Patients with Primary (AL) Amyloidosis." Marian T. Hannan, senior research data analyst at the Multipurpose Arthritis Center, received a first-year doctoral dissertation award for "A Cohort Study of Height Loss and Osteoporosis," under the direction of Felson. Saralynn H. Allaire, Sc.D., an assistant research professor of medicine, received a first-year new investigator grant for "Homemaking Disability and Arthritis: Importance of Disease, Family and Personal Factors," under the supervision of Meenan. Lee Anna Jones, M.D., a fellow in the Arthritis Center, received a first-year postdoctoral fellowship for her research project titled "Molecular Mechanisms in Familial Amyloidotic Polyneuropathy," under the supervision of Skinner.

SPH faculty member receives W. K. Kellogg Foundation National Fellowship Award

Daniel M. Merrigan, Ed.D., an assistant professor of social and behavioral sciences at the School of Public Health, is one of 45 Americans selected by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to participate in the Kellogg National Fellowship Program (KNFP).

The program was established in 1980 to help the nation expand its pool of capable leaders. Kellogg fellows receive a three-year grant of $35,000 to support their own self-designed plans of study, and participate in educational seminars structured to strengthen their leadership skills. In addition, fellows carry out personal learning plans outside their areas of expertise so they can deal more creatively and effectively with society's complex problems.

Among his professional accomplishments, Merrigan founded and developed SPH's special program in HIV/AIDS and Substance Abuse Education—a program that provides training and career opportunities for minority health-care workers.

Garber named director of Brockton's new cardiac catheterization laboratory

Gary R. Garber, M.D., an assistant professor of medicine, has been named the medical director of the new $1.2-million cardiac catheterization laboratory at Brockton Hospital, one of the School of Medicine's affiliated teaching hospitals. Garber formally served as director of computer applications in cardiology at the University Hospital.

"Dr. Garber is a highly credentialed and well-respected cardiologist. Under his direction, Brockton Hospital's new cardiac catheterization laboratory will provide patients with access to an important procedure from a highly qualified health-care team," said Brockton Hospital President Norman B. Goodman.

Last year, Brockton Hospital was designated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a regional site for cardiac catheterization. Several reasons were cited, including the excellence of the hospital's medical care and services, its established affiliation with BUSM and the University Hospital, an existing site for catheterization, and its accessibility to the extensive and diverse population it serves.

Wolf named recipient of AHA's first Award for Excellence in Clinical Stroke

Philip A. Wolf, M.D., a professor of neurology and public health, a research professor of medicine and the principal investigator of the Framingham Study, has been named the recipient of the American Heart Association's first Humana Annual Award for Excellence in Clinical Stroke. The purpose of the award is to recognize outstanding clinical research. The award will be presented to Wolf during the 17th International Joint Conference on Stroke and Cerebral Circulation, which will be held in Phoenix, Ariz., from January 30 through February 1, 1992.
College students complete research fellowships at School of Medicine

Three Massachusetts college students recently completed Alvan T. and Viola D. Fuller American Cancer Society Junior Research Fellowships at the School of Medicine.

Lisa Bastiani of Acton completed her fellowship in the laboratory of Shyr-Te Ju, Ph.D., an associate research professor of medicine. Her work involved how cells in the immune system are activated to kill foreign cells within the body.

Niels Godfredson of Brookline completed his fellowship in the pathology laboratory of Nancy L. R. Bucher, M.D., a research professor of pathology. His research involved studying the different levels of cancer growth in liver cells.

Stefan Gross of Foxboro completed his fellowship in the pathology laboratory of Mary Jo Mumane, Ph.D., an assistant professor of pathology and an assistant research professor of biochemistry. His research focused on studying the different stages of cancer as it develops.

Medical school student poetry competition has Dec. 31 deadline

Medical students who enjoy expressing themselves through poetry should not miss the chance to enter the tenth annual William Carlos Williams Poetry Competition, sponsored by Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine. The competition is open to medical students throughout the United States and Canada. Poetry must be submitted by December 31, 1991. Winning poems will be announced by March 31, 1992, and will be reviewed by the editors of the Journal of the American Medical Association for possible publication. The top three poems will be awarded $300, $200 and $100, respectively. For more information, contact the Human Values in Medicine Program, Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine, P.O. Box 95, Rootstown, Ohio 44272; (216) 325-2511.

Ashton named director of estate planning

Debra Ashton recently has joined Boston University as the director of the Office of Gift and Estate Planning. Ashton, who previously directed the planned giving activities at Wheaton College and WGBH, is the author of The Complete Guide to Planned Giving, a comprehensive guide to estate planning and charitable giving.

"I am thrilled to join Boston University, which is an exciting and challenging new opportunity for me," said Ashton. "There are so many terrific ways to design creative gift partnerships for donors and Boston University School of Medicine. I love showing people interested in helping secure the School's future a method of giving a 'smart gift,' one that will absolutely benefit them, as well as the School, by generating tax savings or income."

Ashton added that anyone, regardless of her or his financial means, can benefit from a carefully planned gift; she would welcome the opportunity to answer questions about this subject for Medical Center employees. Ashton can be reached at the Charles River Campus Office of Development, 353-2255.
A course titled "Uro-Oncology Update: 1992" will take place on January 11 at The Ritz-Carlton in Boston. Specifically designed for urologists and oncologists, this course will provide an update on the recent advances in the field of uro-oncology.

A conference on "Gynecologic Oncology for the Clinician" will take place at Boston University Medical Center on January 18. This course has been designed to provide the general practitioner of obstetrics and gynecology with an up-to-date practical approach to those oncologic conditions he or she is most likely to treat. The focus of this session will be on squamous cell neoplasia of the lower genital tract, with a wide range of treatment options for younger women.

For more information on these and other courses, contact the Department of Continuing Medical Education at 638-4605 (x4605).

1991 United Way Campaign under way

Boston University's annual fundraising campaign on behalf of the United Way was kicked off on Oct. 9, 1991. This year's goal is to raise $150,000 and to obtain maximum participation from everyone at the University.

"We know that the School of Medicine will once again lead the University in showing its support of the United Way," said Dean Aram V. Chobanian. "The needs are great and we hope to have full participation."

The 1991 BU United Campaign will end on Nov. 22. Any questions regarding the campaign should be directed to departmental volunteer coordinators; or to Abby Murphy, Office of Development, 638-4570 (x4570), or Diana Lehman, Office of the Dean, 638-5300 (x5300).