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Georgia Southern student project adds value to the Georgia healthcare system

MAY 22, 2007

As they review and quantify the results of a recent Georgia Cancer Coalition pilot survey, students in the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health (JPHCOPH) are not only learning about cancer screening behaviors, but also adding value to the Georgia healthcare system. Their project will culminate in a user-friendly Web site that will allow anyone to view the survey results and use them to create effective cancer screening programs across the state.

‘It costs about \$3,000 to undergo a colonoscopy, the medical test that checks for colon cancer,’ said Gerald Ledlow, associate professor of health services administration, ‘and it costs more than \$300,000 to treat stage III or IV colon cancer. If this Georgia Cancer Coalition survey and the resulting informational Web site developed by our students helps even one person through screening and early cancer treatment, healthcare costs in Georgia will be reduced.’

Last fall the Georgia Cancer Coalition funded the pilot survey to gather information on breast, colon, and prostate cancer screening behaviors in residents of six counties in South Georgia. If the survey is validated in other words, if the survey operates properly it could be a model for gathering data from the entire state of Georgia.

The six counties are paired so that one is rural, one is urban: McIntosh and Chatham counties; Terrell and Lowndes counties; and Peach and Bibb counties. Residents in each county were asked by their local Georgia Cancer Coalition offices to complete the survey, and they can do that in one of three ways: online, on the telephone, and by hard copy.

‘By offering our respondents a variety of ways to share their information, we expect to get more responses,’ said Kelley Chester, a graduate student working with Ledlow on the project. ‘And by having the local Georgia Cancer Coalition offices notify their residents through letters and calls about the survey, we expect better compliance. More people will take the time and trouble to complete the survey if they know the person who asks them to.’

Ledlow directs the college’s Center for Survey Research and Health Information, so he has a great interest not only in getting the survey completed, but in sharing its results. He enlisted six graduate students to analyze the survey data and narrow the focus as far as individual census tracts, and a graphics communication student to help design the pages of the Web site.

‘Because our goal is to draw health care providers and organizations to the Web site for help in designing cancer screening programs, it’s important that the Web site we develop be user-friendly,’

said Chester. "Users will be able to search this information by age, education level, census tract, income, and other demographic feature, but we also want to be able to customize searches. We want them to be able to search on the unique features related to health, to determine appropriate interventions, and find ways to increase the number of Georgia residents who are screened for breast, colon, and prostate cancers."

"Georgia currently ranks in the top half among the 50 states in the incidence of cancer," said Ledlow. "In partnership with the Georgia Cancer Coalition, our ongoing goal at the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health is to provide education and services that will reduce cancer rates and create healthier lives for all residents of Georgia."