What separates Motao Zhu, MD, PhD, from many others is the potential impact of his research on human lives.

Dr. Zhu, an epidemiologist in WVU’s School of Public Health, was recently awarded a $546,000 grant from the Department of Health and Human Services’ Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, a component of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The grant covers three years ($182,000 per year). Zhu’s mission is to gauge the effectiveness of states’ laws limiting or banning cellphone use while driving.

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Over the last 11 years, Zhu has secured more than $2.2 million in funding for his research into motor vehicle and pedestrian safety.

“I’m really interested in this area of research, it’s a hot topic nationally,” Zhu said. “This type of research can directly affect policies about cell phone use in vehicles. It affects lives, which is very rewarding.”

Zhu’s research will look at the regulations on texting and talking, how they are being enforced, and whether they are affecting crash rates among young drivers. He will be analyzing data from three public databases during the study: one contains traffic fatality records and another provides results from a teen survey about behaviors. The third is a sampling obtained by people assigned to watch traffic and count the instances they see of cellphone use.

He said that 42 states and the District of Columbia have some type of law that restricts cellphone use for drivers under 21 years old. These restrictions can range from total bans to texting bans for those under 18. Punishments and rules on when a citation can be issued vary by state, Zhu said.

For example, starting in July, any driver in West Virginia can be pulled over and cited for using a handheld cellphone.

Zhu is the principal investigator on the NIH grant, which will run through 2015. He is especially proud to receive NIH funding during a sluggish economy which has led to budget cuts and reduced opportunities for research awards. He said he finished among the top percentile of recent grant applicants.

“I’ve been successful at getting grants at WVU,” Zhu said.

In addition to his current study on the effectiveness of cell phone use and texting laws, Dr. Zhu has recently published articles on the effectiveness of graduated driver licensing, pedestrian fatalities and motor-vehicle crash risks in rural and urban areas of the Appalachian Region. For a list of other research projects that include Zhu as principal investigator or co-investigator see: http://publichealth.hsc.wvu.edu/pages/MediaLibraries/PublicHealth/Media/Documents/Curriculum%20Vitae/zhu.pdf

He also recently co-authored an opinion piece with Jeffrey H. Coben, M.D., director of the ICRC and Interim Dean, School of Public Health, for Viewpoint, a column in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The column called for new regulatory and technological approaches to reduce the use of hand-held devices while driving. To see the full text, visit: http://jama.jamanetwork.com/Mobile/article.aspx?articleid=1660390.

Zhu and his wife are expecting their first child, a baby boy, in August.
New ICRC Research...

WVU researchers and southern WV community partners address significant drug overdose problem

A team made up of WVU researchers and their community partners from southern West Virginia, has received a $50,000 pilot funding grant from the West Virginia Clinical and Translational Science Institute (WVCTSI) to study the feasibility of initiating drug overdose prevention programs in three rural high-risk southern West Virginia counties.

West Virginia has the highest rate of unintentional poisoning deaths in the nation, with fatal overdoses from prescription opioids (painkillers) accounting for the majority of those deaths. In fact, more people now die from abuse of prescription drugs than of the illicit drugs cocaine and heroin combined. Reports of successful overdose prevention programs among heroin users in U.S. urban centers suggested to the WVU-community team that such programs could be effective among prescription drug users in rural areas.

In these programs, drug users are recruited and trained in overdose recognition and response, including how to perform rescue breathing, place the victim in the recovery position, call 911, and administer the overdose antidote naloxone (also known by its trade name Narcan®). Naloxone is a prescription medication that reverses the effects of an overdose by temporarily blocking the effects of opioids in the brain, including the respiratory depression which often leads to death. Though such programs have been effectively implemented in urban settings in the U.S. and other nations, in order to determine their potential effectiveness in a rural U.S. setting, researchers must first determine drug use patterns among these rural users, as well as their willingness to participate in such a program.

Principal Investigator Kelly K. Gurka, MPH, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Epidemiology in the WVU School of Public Health, says this research will assess whether rural drug users are willing to participate in an opioid overdose reversal program that features take-home naloxone. Dr. Gurka’s research team—all of whom are affiliated with the WVU Injury Control Research Center—will work closely with substance abuse prevention coalition members and faith-based volunteers in Mingo, Boone and Logan counties—three of the highest risk counties in the state—to recruit and interview participants. Data collection is slated to begin this summer.

“The data we collect through this project will help to inform both the scientific community and the substance abuse prevention community regarding drug use patterns among rural drug users,” said Gurka. “With a better understanding of the drug use patterns of people living in rural settings, we can better translate or develop effective programs, and implement them to prevent fatal overdose due to opioids.”

Gurka says if their research findings show that rural and urban drug users share similar drug use patterns, such as using drugs in groups rather than by themselves, and that they are willing to participate, then such a program could work in West Virginia.

(continued on next page)
New ICRC Research... (continued)

She says research has shown that some drug users tend to reduce the amount of drugs they use, and even seek treatment after participating in these programs.

“I’m really excited for the opportunity to pursue this research in West Virginia, with the anticipation that positive findings will position our team to effectively compete for additional federal funding. Such funding will enable us to implement and evaluate programs that, I believe, can ultimately save lives and positively improve the health and well-being of our state citizens in general,” said Gurka.

This pilot research project is sponsored by the Community Engagement and Outreach core of the WVCTSI. Grant applicants were required to propose research that represented collaboration between researchers and community partners, both in planning and conducting the study.

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ICRC Outreach Notes

ICRC prepares report on opioid overdose prevention programs featuring “take-home naloxone”

In April, WVU-ICRC released a report summarizing the effectiveness of prescription opioid overdose programs featuring “take-home naloxone.” Such programs have been effectively initiated in large urban areas in the U.S. and internationally.

Naloxone has been used for several decades by medical personnel in hospitals and emergency medical technicians in the field to reverse overdoses from illicit drugs such as heroin, as well as prescribed opioid painkillers such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and methadone. These innovative urban “take-home” programs dispense naloxone to drug users and their peers after training them to recognize and respond to overdoses.

The report, Opioid Overdose Prevention Programs with Take-Home Naloxone in West Virginia and Other Central Appalachian States, suggests that studies are needed to determine the feasibility of translating such programs to high-risk rural regions, such as Southern West Virginia and other parts of rural Central Appalachia. (See previous article.) The report also suggests legislative approaches that may facilitate such programs by removing legal and liability issues for individuals who participate in such programs, or who call 911 when they recognize an overdose.

ICRC launches IP News service

In April, WVU-ICRC launched the Injury Prevention Research, Practice, and Policy News (IP News), a weekly summary of new research findings, technical reports, news stories, and opinions on risks and prevention associated with falls among older persons, intimate partner violence, motor-vehicle-related injuries, occupational injuries and violence, suicide and self harm, traumatic brain injuries, and unintentional poisonings. Click here to subscribe.
Well-deserved but ‘total surprise’—this time spotlight shines on ICRC’s Fulaytar

When David Fulaytar discovered he’d been nominated for the inaugural Chancellor’s Award, he admits the news came as a “total surprise.”

And when he reflects on being one of eight winners encompassing the entire Health Sciences enterprise, he describes the feeling as “humbling.”

Dig a little deeper and the feeling is pride, mixed with a bit of irony.

Fulaytar, an administrator at the WVU Health Sciences Center for 18 years, most recently with the Injury Control Research Center, relishes being in a support role, not the spotlight. His award was in the Administrative/Managerial category.

“I’m humbled and very appreciative of my peers and co-workers who took time from their extremely busy schedules to nominate me,” Fulaytar said. “With that said, I don’t seek recognition and take greater pleasure with supporting and helping others.”

Case in point: A few years ago, Fulaytar created nomination packets for the Health Sciences Center Employee of the Year Award and employees he’d nominated won the award five years in a row. Fulaytar said the recognition the winners received was as gratifying as winning an award himself.

“Providing support is key and critical to the success of any job,” Fulaytar said. “People can’t do their jobs unless you support them adequately.”

Fulaytar’s experience in the military helped mold his philosophy. He spent 20 years in the U.S. Air Force as a personnel manager, eventually retiring in 1995 as a Senior Master Sergeant. A native of Barrackville, W.Va., he returned home and joined

David Fulaytar, right, a senior program administrator at the WVU Injury Control Research Center, poses with Christopher C. Colenda, MD, MPH, Chancellor for Health Sciences and recently-named president and CEO of the WV United Health System, at a ceremony honoring winners of the inaugural Chancellor’s Award.

WVU’s Center for Rural Emergency Medicine in the 1990s. As senior program administrator with the ICRC, Fulaytar provides senior administrative management and support to director Jeff Coben, 70 affiliated faculty and students. He also provides direct supervision to the administrative staff. Fulaytar is responsible for all business aspects of the Center including fiscal and personnel management, business administration and operations, grant/budget preparation, and facility management. He executes and administers all sub-contracts, and financial agreements external to the institution.

“Dave is an extremely talented administrator who knows how to get the best out of people,” Dr. Coben said. “He always has that positive spirit that people respond to, and he’s a tireless worker who knows how to get things done.” Coben is not alone in his praise. (See Fulaytar on page 16)
ICRC Partner Spotlight:
WV Council for the Prevention of Suicide

Bob Musick’s curiosity led to an initiative that has become a crucial part of West Virginia’s healthcare landscape for the past 13 years.

But the creation of the West Virginia Council for the Prevention of Suicide (WVCPS) was not an overnight occurrence. Musick’s ideas about suicide prevention took shape when he was a WVU graduate student in the Department of Psychology in 1975 and evolved over time.

“I just noticed there were several suicides in the area,” Musick recalled. “No data was being collected on suicides. This led me to researching and collecting data which led to starting a program. The interest has been there for a long time.”

In 1999, Musick put together a mini workshop on suicide for Monongalia County Schools, which was eventually presented in schools across the state at the request of Dave Majic, then director of the WV

Division of Children’s Mental Health Services.

Two years later, Musick secured a grant from the Children’s Division of the Office of Behavioral Health Services in the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities on behalf of Morgantown-based Valley HealthCare System.

The funding launched the WVCPS predecessor known as Helping Our Teens Thrive Coalition (HOTT Coalition), which was composed of representatives of health and behavioral health providers, educators and interested members of the public. It provided several seminars and workshops to alert school personnel and the public about the number of children who were dying by suicide in the state as well as identifying strategies to prevent such untimely and tragic deaths.

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The workshops and seminars were well received and the HOTT Coalition grew into the West Virginia Council for the Prevention of Suicide. The WVCPS expanded its target population to include adults and created a website (http://www.wvsuicidecouncil.org/) to raise its profile. Also, it began providing bi-annual conferences that attracted several hundred health and behavioral health providers and other individuals. The Council has developed awareness curricula addressing all age groups, and currently provides workshops covering the entire lifespan.

The emergence and growth of WVCPS has coincided with a rising awareness of suicide as a public health crisis nationally and in the state of West Virginia.

In 2012, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin proclaimed Sept. 9-15 as Suicide Prevention Week at the state Capitol to coincide with World Suicide Prevention Day. He also visited Hedgesville High School to speak to students about the problem.

“Governor Tomblin’s administration is committed to providing suicide prevention services to all citizens,” Musick said. “The West Virginia Bureau for Behavioral Health and Health Facilities has been a great partner in developing these services. The future is very bright in our state.”

But the challenges are great. In a recently-published American Journal of Public Health article, WVU’s Dr. Ian Rockett revealed that in 2009, deaths by suicide exceeded deaths by motor vehicle crash for the first time in the U.S. since the early 1920s, when automobiles first emerged as the leading cause of injury death. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among West Virginians ages 15-24 and the third-leading cause of death for that age group nationwide.

To help reverse those trends, WVCPS has established partnerships with WVU, along with national and state organizations and community leaders.

Its WVU connections include the School of Public Health and the Injury Control Research Center and it works with WVU’s Carruth Center for Psychologica-
The Injury Control Research Center’s Exploratory Research Program recently awarded grants to two of its faculty affiliates: Amy Fiske, PhD, an associate professor in the WVU Department of Psychology, and Jean McCrory, PhD, an assistant professor in the WVU Department of Human Performance and Applied Exercise Science.

Dr. Fiske's study is called “Coping with Chronic Illness: Prospective Study of Suicidal Ideation.” It involves examining the effects of control strategies used by older adults with recent onset of physical limitations due to illness to determine how they affect depressive symptoms, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts.

In a previous research project, Fiske discovered that compensatory control strategies, such as asking others for help, were associated with reduced levels of suicidal thoughts. Those strategies controlled depressive symptoms among individuals with health-related functional limitations.

The new project seeks to discover the time frame it takes for a control strategy to be used in relation to physical limitation and which individuals may benefit most from use of particular control strategies.

The award is for $49,999 over 18 months.

Dr. McCrory’s study is called “An Analysis of Postural Instability in Women with Urinary Incontinence.” It involves comparing static and dynamic postural control in women with urinary incontinence to a group of age and parity-matched controls to determine the effect of a physical therapy intervention for UI on static and dynamic postural control.

Through this research, McCrory hopes to compare static and dynamic postural control in women with UI to a group of age and parity-matched controls and determine the effect of a physical therapy intervention for UI on static and dynamic postural control.

The award is for $49,391 over 18 months.
Imagine getting a phone call from Jerry West...

It happened to me and it’s even hard for me to imagine.

It’s Jerry West … WVU legend, NBA Hall of Famer, the man whose image was used to create the NBA logo. And the guy I used to pretend to be on occasion while playing Nerf basketball indoors against my brother or shooting baskets on playground courts and in driveways throughout my youth.

It was a 15-minute interview that surely faded from West’s memory within minutes but will stick with me the rest of my life.

What makes it sweeter is the conversation was part of my job. Yeah, I got paid to do that.

As a professional communicator, not every day is going to be rainbows, chocolate and phone conversations with Jerry West. But the opportunities available to us and the variety of subjects we are exposed to can be mind boggling to people with jobs that never escape a routine. In the last few years alone, I’ve written about nanotechnology aimed at helping Alzheimer’s patients, new citizens being naturalized into the U.S. and a group of beautiful and amazing dogs trained to sniff out bombs for the WVU Police Department. Playing with two golden retrievers – yeah, I got paid to do that too.

Over the years – have I really been at this going on three decades? – I’ve witnessed and written about innovative, ground-breaking research that saves lives or improves the quality of life for West Virginians and people all over the world. The dedicated scientists behind the research are as impressive as their discoveries.

Which brings us to my latest opportunity, the Injury Control Research Center.

I’m glad to have been named the communications specialist for the ICRC and look forward to performing whatever duties I’m asked to fulfill. I’m just getting started and am feeling my way along but am greatly impressed with the mission and vision of the staff and faculty involved.

With the communications skills I’ve developed over the years, I hope to highlight our significant achievements to internal stakeholders and external media while also raising our public profile with citizens around the state and world.

I’m experienced in just about any and every form of professional communications imaginable, from press releases, to speech writing, to writing for blogs, websites and social media platforms. And if the situation calls for it, I could probably pull off haiku or iambic pentameter. (Let’s hope the situation never calls for it … for your sake.)

But as a 21st-century communicator, I’ve tried to step up my game by learning audio and video recording and editing techniques and expanding my ability at providing content for web and social media outlets. I may not be an expert in everything, but I’m game to try whatever challenges come down the pike.

Feel free to contact me if you need information about the WVU Injury Control Research Center, or if you would just like to chat about your own communications challenges.

Contact Dan at: dshrensky@hsc.wvu.edu
ICRC Education/Training Notes

Students, faculty recognized at ICRC ceremony

The WVU Injury Control Research Center presented its 2012-2013 awards during a ceremony at the Health Sciences Center on May 17.

Jeffrey Coben, MD, ICRC director and interim dean, WVU School of Public Health, presented the awards. Kelly Gurka, MPH, PhD, the ICRC’s assistant director for Education and Training, also spoke at the ceremony.

Earning certificates for completion of the concentration of Injury Prevention and Control were Clayton Allison, Lindsay Beery and Miheret Yitayew. Sarra Nazem was the recipient of the Student Travel Award and Student Research Award.

Ruth Kershner earned the Faculty Teaching Award.

The recipient receives a one-year paid membership to a professional injury-related organization of their choice. The Faculty Teaching Award was established to recognize demonstrated excellence in teaching and/or mentoring relating to injury and violence prevention.

To see a page of photos from the event, visit: http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/icrc/Pages/News-Announcements/ICRC-Awards-2013.

Emory Center for Injury Control hires Beery

Lindsay Beery, who earned a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree from WVU’s School of Public Health in December, recently joined Emory University’s Center for Injury Control as a program coordinator.

Beery, who had a concentration in Injury Prevention and Control, says she is helping to coordinate two significant events: Emory’s 20th anniversary as an Injury Prevention and Control Center and the World Safety and Injury Prevention Conference, which will be held in Atlanta Oct. 19-23, 2014.

She said her role also includes outreach and fund-raising.

Emory’s Center is one of 11 institutions funded by the Centers for Disease Control, and Prevention.

Yitayew joins Illinois hospital as resident

Miheret Yitayew, who also earned an MPH degree from WVU’s School of Public Health in December, recently joined the John H. Stroger Cook County Hospital in the pediatric residency program.

Born and raised in Ethiopia, Dr. Yitayew graduated from Gondar University in Ethiopia with a Doctor of Medicine Degree in 2007, worked as a general

(See Alumni News on page 16)
ICRC Faculty Publications...

[The following is a list of faculty publications since the October, 2012 issue of The Safety Net. To see lists of publications by topic or year, please visit: http://www.hsc.wvu.edu/icrc/Pages/Publications]


11. Carter MW. Emergency Department Visits Related to Suicide Attempts among Older Adults: A Nationally Representative Study. (In-Press)


25. Gurka KK, Marshall SW, Casteel C, Runyan CW, Loomis DP, Richardson DB. An Examination of Strategies for Preventing Workplace Homicides Committed by Perpetrators That Have a Prior Relationship With the Workplace or Its Employees. JOEM 2012; 54(12):1533-1538.


32. Ide N, Kolves K, Cassaniti M, De Leo D. Suicide in first generation immigrants to Australia, 1990-


Fulaytar (continued from page 5)

James Helmkamp, Ph.D., an epidemiologist and former director of CREM and ICRC who is now an affiliated faculty member, said Fulaytar was the “glue” that held CREM and ICRC together.

“His attention to detail, efficiency, and timeliness in preparing the voluminous competitive grants contributed significantly to the long-standing success of the Centers,” Helmkamp said.

“I remember his incredible wisdom, humor, and narrative stories that he always brought to everyone’s birthday parties and holiday season celebrations,” Helmkamp said. “If he ever needed another career he could be an incredible stand-up comic. His work-ethic is remarkable and I hold him in the highest respect for his honorable service to the country and to WVU.”

Alumni News (continued from page 10)

practitioner at a referral hospital in southern Ethiopia for almost two years, and arrived in the U.S. in 2009.

Yitayew was a graduate research assistant under Kelly Gurka, MPH, PhD, at the ICRC.

Mark your calendars....

12th World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion

October 19-23, 2014 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA

The CDC Injury Center, the Center for Injury Control at Emory University, and the Johns Hopkins International Injury Research Unit of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health are pleased to host the next World Conference on Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion in Atlanta, Georgia, United States of America. The conference is held biennially under the auspices of the World Health Organization. It brings together the world’s leading injury prevention and safety researchers, practitioners and advocates, to build our knowledge and strengthen the fields of injury prevention and safety promotion worldwide.

For more information, email the CDC at InjuryCenter@cdc.gov.