

STANFORD UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER

News Bureau Stanford, California 94305

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Gary Cavalli

415: 321-5310

Editors and Science Writers:

The following story concerns a new Stanford program to combat heart disease through the use of mass media campaigns. This represents the first time the media will be used in a community setting (Watsonville and Gilroy) in an attempt to persuade people to change high risk habits. It will also mark the first attempt by scientists to critically evaluate whether or not the media can play an important role in behavior change efforts. To determine the success of the campaign, a before-and-after comparison of heart disease risk factors will be made in a random sample of 500 individuals in Watsonville and Gilroy.

You are invited to send your representatives to a press conference on Thursday, September 7, at 10:30 a.m. in Room M114 at Stanford Medical School. Dr. John Farquhar, head of the interdisciplinary research team, and Dr. Henry Breitrose, associate professor of communication, will discuss the program.

Additionally, two television spots which will be utilized in the media campaign will be shown at the press conference. Prints of these television spots will be made available to all television stations attending the conference.

ADVANCE FOR P.M. RELEASE THURSDAY, SEPT. 7

STANFORD -- Stanford University researchers today (Sept. 7) announced plans to launch a new, community-based program to help prevent heart disease, using mass media campaigns in an attempt to persuade people to change high risk habits.

The project represents the first time that newspapers, television, and radio will be employed in a behavior change effort at the community level. It also marks the first attempt by scientists to evaluate critically whether or not the media can be used successfully for this purpose.

An interdisciplinary research team headed by Dr. John W. Farquhar, associate professor of medicine at Stanford's School of Medicine, will begin implementing the program next week in the community of Watsonville. Several other Northern California towns will be involved during the next few months.

Watsonville and Gilroy will receive the initial mass media, behavior change campaigns for a period of one year, Farquhar said. To determine the success of the campaigns, a random sample of 500 individuals per town will be selected for before-and-after comparison of heart disease risk factors such as blood pressure, body weight, and levels of blood sugar, fats and cholesterol.

Along with the media campaigns, virtually concurrent one-year research studies related to the causes, prevalence, and risk factors of heart disease will be conducted in Tracy and the communities of San Mateo County.

Farquhar stressed that all planning for the project was done in close cooperation with local heart associations and medical societies, and civic organizations in the involved communities. "Their input was solicited from the beginning," he said, "and they've been very enthusiastic about the project. Without their cooperation and interest, we simply couldn't have gotten off the ground." -more-

The program has been in the planning stage since it was established a year ago with the support of two grants from the National Heart and Lung Institute. The grants, due to run at least five years, totalled over \$750,000 the first year and are projected at nearly \$4 million for five years.

In the next several years, the researchers plan to conduct further studies and behavior change campaigns in other California towns.

Farquhar said the Stanford project represents the type of preventive efforts needed to help stem the "epidemic" of heart disease in this country, which claims the lives of over 600,000 Americans per year.

"Most of the deaths of people under 65 in the United States due to coronary heart disease are preventable," he said. "We believe that success in achieving substantial behavior change at the community level lies at the root of any future national campaign to reduce premature mortality from heart disease and stroke."

Farquhar identified several high risk habits which will be targets of the media campaign, including smoking; physical inactivity or lack of exercise; gaining excess weight; and consuming increased amounts of cholesterol, saturated fats, sugar, salt and alcohol. Physicians have long associated these habits with heart disease.

"We're not advocating that people make massive changes in their lifestyle, just small but significant ones," said Dr. Henry Breitrose, associate professor of communication and a member of the research team.

"Our message will be a simple one--minor changes in a person's daily activities can significantly reduce his heart disease risk factors."

The campaign, which will be conducted in both English and Spanish, will utilize radio and television spots, press releases, recipe columns in local newspapers, a "cooking for your heart health" cookbook, and possibly other media.

A subgroup of certain high risk individuals will receive an intensive follow-up campaign, Farquhar said. These "triggering" sessions will consist of frequent meetings of the high risk group with "change agents" from the Stanford research team in an encounter group atmosphere.

Preliminary testing of the individuals in the random sample will begin next week in Watsonville and in Gilroy in mid-October. The data-gathering efforts in Tracy and in San Mateo County communities are due to begin in November.

Initially, home interviews will be conducted with individuals in the random samples to explain the nature and goals of the project, Farquhar said. Then, a survey center will be established in each town, where those in the sample will be given physical examinations and tested for prevalence of heart disease risk factors, including body weight, blood pressure, and levels of blood fats, cholesterol and sugar.

"At the end of a year, we'll come back to check the same things in these same people," Farquhar said. "In addition to behavior change, we'll be looking for beneficial changes in attitude, motivation, and information."

In obtaining this data, tests and examinations at the survey center will be supplemented by detailed written questionnaires.

The before-and-after aspect of the Stanford project distinguishes it from previous behavior change efforts, Farquhar noted.

"Money has been spent in the past on media campaigns to change behavior and get people to do the right thing," he said, "but no attempt was made to find out whether they worked."

Involved in the planning of the project and the production of the media campaign has been a research team consisting of physicians, behavioral scientists, journalists, television and film specialists, dieticians, exercise physiologists, and statisticians.

Dr. Nathan Maccoby, professor of communication, is co-principal investigator of the project with Dr. Farquhar. The media campaign is directed by Janet Alexander of the Department of Communication. Dr. Peter D. Wood, senior scientist at the Medical School and deputy director of the program, will supervise testing for levels of blood lipids (cholesterol, fats, and other compounds).

Farquhar noted that the Stanford project, initiated last June with the establishment of a Lipid Research Clinic and Specialized Center of Research (SCOR) in arteriosclerosis, reflects a new federal commitment to the prevention of heart disease. Fifteen SCOR centers and 12 Lipid Research Clinics focusing on arteriosclerosis detection and prevention have been developed nationwide since the National Heart and Lung Institute began the program last year.

A vast number of civic organizations, medical groups, and individuals in the involved communities have worked closely with the Stanford researchers in the development of the project, including: county medical societies, health departments, and comprehensive health planning agencies; local heart associations; community hospitals; chambers of commerce; mayors' offices; city councils; and local newspapers, radio and television stations.

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