



STRAIGHT from the Baby's mouth

A newsletter from
the COHRA team at
West Virginia University



West Virginia University
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WVU student helps Anya Thompson (L) and
Breanna Mazzella (R) help COHRA2 run smoothly

2017 - Year in Review, 2018 - Moving Ahead

COHRA continues to be active throughout West Virginia. With partner facilities across the state, we travel to work with mothers and their children who have involved themselves in our project. We appreciate our many community partners, including health departments, dental offices, hospitals and medical offices, who provide space and support for COHRA. They make it possible for us to meet with women and their children in locations across the state that are close to their homes. There were 557 women in West Virginia who volunteered during their pregnancy to participate in the COHRA project, and we continue to happily work with them, and to follow their health and that of their children. In 2017, there were 372 in-person visits with research vparticipants in West Virginia, and 609 telephone interviews. We will continue working with the women and children already in the study, and hope they will remain our partners into the future!

There is a new initiative in 2018, known as "COHRA Smiles," which involves pregnant women in West Virginia who identify as African American. Over the next two years or so, we will be actively recruiting African American women who are in their first or second trimesters of pregnancy. We are recruiting throughout the state, but particularly in certain population areas. We hope that through COHRA Smiles, we can provide new discoveries that will benefit all West Virginians.



Starting January 2nd, research participants will
be compensated **\$25**
for completing telephone interviews!

Call us today to see when you are due to complete
your next telephone interview!

(877)988-3384

Dr. Dan McNeil
Principal Investigator, WVU

*Growing healthy smiles,
one mom at a time*

Research Update

COHRA depends, first, on the women and children who participate in the project, and on the community partners that support the project with space and in so many other ways. The COHRA field staff gather data so that the scientific investigators can analyze and interpret it, so that there is a greater understanding of what can be done to improve and sustain oral health in West Virginia and elsewhere in Appalachia. In 2017, the science arm of COHRA was extremely active, producing 11 articles in professional journals, and 12 presentations at conferences! These numbers are but one year's productivity in the 89 publications and 139 presentations from COHRA to date. There were a variety of research focus areas in 2017, including genetics and individual behavioral factors that affect dental health. Two articles that appeared in dental-related special issues of the journal *Pain Research and Management* are interesting, in that they both focus on dental fear and anxiety. One of these studies focused on periodontal (gum) disease, how it affects quality of life, and in what ways fears about pain and dental fear and anxiety are involved. Findings suggested that individuals with visible gum disease who are pain-sensitive may have the highest levels of fear and avoidance of dental care, which may have a compounding, negative effect on their quality of life. Another study focused on fear of pain, and identified three genes that may distinguish people with higher and lower fears about minor pain. Less severe pain actually may differentiate individuals more than severe pain, as coping with high intensity pain is universally difficult. Past research from COHRA investigators has confirmed the importance of fear of pain as a major component of dental care-related anxiety and fear. You can see an up-to-date list of COHRA publications on our web site at:

<http://dentistry.hsc.wvu.edu/cohra/bibliography/>



Thoughts from the PI

I am happy to report that the National Institute of Dental Research reviewed our progress and evaluated our application for funding, and is continuing to fully support the COHRA project for another five years, through 2021. In addition, given the success of our work over the past 15+ years, additional funding has been awarded to COHRA to include a new part of the project that focuses on dental health in African American women and their children. There have been a number of staff transitions this year, as some of our colleagues have moved on and others have joined us. The West Virginia COHRA staff is the largest it has ever been, consistent with our current mission to continue to follow mothers and their children at least through age 6, and to work with African American women during pregnancy and after the birth of the child. A valued new partner in this project is Dr. Linda Alexander, who is Senior Associate Dean WVU's School of Public Health. As a WVU co-investigator with the project, Dr. Alexander brings considerable expertise on tobacco use, and connections to African American communities. Joining our team is Barb Thaxton, RDH, who has worked with the West Virginia Oral Health Coalition for a number of years, as well as Kyndel Evans, a recruiter and community liaison.

In order to fully utilize support from West Virginia University, we have begun to include WVU students as research assistants. This past summer, Breanna Mazzella who is from Fenwick, worked in assisting Linda Brown, RDH, in our Summersville office, and logged hundreds of miles on the road, traveling to meet our research participants. Breanna is now a student in Morgantown, in the WVU Master of Science in Industrial Relations program, and continues to work with the project. Also working with the team is Anya Thompson, a WVU undergraduate in Psychology.

Last but certainly not least, there are two doctoral students in Psychology, Matthew Arias and Casey Wright, who work with me and who are indispensable in analyzing data and conceptualizing scientific articles. Welcome to all of our new West Virginia COHRA colleagues! As 2018 unfolds, there are wonderful opportunities with COHRA to help us understand the best ways to enhance oral health in West Virginia to benefit future generations.



Karolyn Ruggles

Staff Peek

Dental Assistant

Karolyn Reel joined the research team in September 2016. Although new to research, she is no stranger to dentistry, with 31 years of private dental practice experience. Her prior experience also includes organizing a Dental Assisting program for the Monongalia County Board of Education along with teaching the program for 8 years. Ironically, Michael Law, who is now her immediate supervisor, was a student in her class the first year the program was offered to high school students.

Karolyn has raised 2 beautiful daughters. Tiffany is age 27 and Trisha is 26 years of age. Karolyn is a native of Preston County, presently residing in Tunnelton with her husband, David Ruggles. Karolyn loves spending time with extended family and friends at their camp at Seneca Rocks and also spends as much time as possible with her parents, Clinton and Dolly Ridenour.

Karolyn is very happy with her career change and she understands the importance of research from the use of research in education and her teaching experience. She looks forward to continuing work with the COHRA research team, helping to make a difference in the oral health of children.

Contact Us

dentalhealthstudy.com

 WVU Dental Health & Pregnancy Study

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For more information about the project, please call please call **(877) 988-3384**.

