

February 21, 2008

Dear SPR Members,

This is the first of a series of letters I will be writing to update you on the progress SPR committees and task groups are making in several areas on your behalf. One of my mission items was to develop mechanisms to involve more of you in the work of SPR and to elicit your concerns and ideas for moving forward the field of prevention science and specifically, prevention research. These letters represent one part of that effort.

As one of the founders of SPR I have seen a great deal of progress in several areas over the last 16 years. We began as a small group of drug abuse prevention researchers seeking a forum to discuss our research and to share our visions for the field of prevention research. Over that time we expanded our purview, recognizing that prevention research spanned health issues other than drug and substance abuse and that indeed prevention research was part of an evolving science with its own theories, terminology and technology.

Under each President and Board of Directors SPR has grown. Membership and sponsorships increased so that not only does the membership cut across disciplines but also SPR conferences and its products are funded by multiple institutes of the National Institutes of Health, foundations, and private groups. The journal *Prevention Science* was established, in 2000, and in 2007 received its first Impact Factor. The 2006 Impact Factor is 2.615. It is ranked seventh out of sixty-six journals in the *Public, Environmental and Occupational Health* category. The 2007 Impact Factor will be released for *Prevention Science* in June, 2008.

Three major efforts were initiated over the past year that I want to bring to your attention. The first is an initiative called Mapping Advances in Prevention Science (MAPS) that is funded by our current NIH conference grant. MAPS are multidisciplinary task forces designed to foster promising, emerging areas of prevention science, articulate a research agenda in those areas, and nurture scientific leadership. They are intended to build on the momentum of scientific exchanges in conference workshops and plenaries through task force activities conducted between conferences. Last year the first MAPS began, focusing on integrating biological and behavioral research around common issues, with activities being coordinated by Tony Biglan, Diana Fishbein and others. The MAPS process is ongoing; a second MAPS on translational research, aimed at investigations directed toward enhancing the adoption, quality implementation and sustainability of effective interventions, is being initiated under Dick Spoth. We will be adding information on MAPS to the SPR website over the next several months.

The second effort relates to advocacy. Under SPR Bylaws a Prevention Science Advocacy Committee was established to "...further the identification and adoption of science based prevention practices and methods". The Committee works in conjunction with the Board of Directors to identify priorities and develop strategy to advocate broadly for prevention science, including funding for the development of preventive interventions, dissemination and sustainability of effective interventions, and the use of science based preventive interventions and methods. Through this committee several products have been developed and are available on the SPR website. If you haven't had a chance to review them, please take time to do so

(<http://www.preventionresearch.org/commlmon.php>). The major documents include:

- Advocacy for Prevention Science
- Community Monitoring Systems
- Standards of Evidence
- Braided Funding

The Advocacy for Prevention Science document is intended as a white paper to describe the field of prevention science and make a strong argument for the critical need for funding and support for prevention science across disciplines. The document is intended as a basic fact sheet to be modified to meet the specific needs of those working with or talking to policy makers and other groups about prevention science. The posted document is a ‘work in progress’ and warrants your special attention and suggestions for revision*.

The Community Monitoring Systems document was the product of a project under the direction of Tony Biglan (our past President) that was jointly funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the National Institutes for Health. The project was intended to increase awareness and advocate a research agenda for Community Monitoring Systems (CMS). CMSs can contribute to the successful development of children and adolescents. Such systems measure critical aspects of child and adolescent well being and the factors that influence their growth. Some communities have already shown that the development and maintenance of these systems can make critical information available to decision makers and community members so that they can improve the school, family, and community practices that affect young people. But there is need for scientific and organizational leadership that can assure the continued development of these systems. The Society for Prevention Research is seeking to promote the research and infrastructure development needed to make these systems widely and effectively available. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is printing copies of this guide for wide distribution across the country.

The SPR Standards of Evidence grew out of task force in response to the growing interest in the diffusion of evidence-based prevention strategies. It was written by a group of SPR members, under the leadership of Brian Flay, and establishes a set of principles for identifying prevention programs and policies that are sufficiently empirically validated to merit being called “tested and efficacious”. The document is intended for use by prevention scientists and others involved in the development, evaluation, and dissemination of evidence-based interventions. The Standards have been widely cited and have influenced program and policy decisions across a number of federal agencies. For example, the Standards were used to help guide review of studies as part of the Academic Competitiveness Council, an initiative led by the Secretary of Education and including representatives from all the federal agencies involved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education. The advocacy committee has also been working to forge relationships with other organizations with similar goals and to co-sponsor initiatives or policy recommendations as those opportunities present. For example, the Board of Directors voted to sign on to a recommendation to Congress put forward by the National Board of Education Science to revise the statutory definition of “scientifically based research” so that it includes studies likely to produce valid conclusions about program effectiveness and exclude studies that might produce erroneous conclusions. One outcome of that recommendation was a

change in the language that passed Congress in the Head Start bill to include such language as “strong claims of causal relationships, only with research designs that eliminate plausible competing explanations for observed results, such as, but not limited to, random assignment experiments”. Continued efforts are being made to improve the language in other bills, such as No Child Left Behind.

The final document on braided or coordinated funding developed by an SPR task group, under the leadership of David Olds, focuses on the need to develop a program to support the research needed to study the process of bringing interventions to scale. The document outlines the scientific and social policy need for coordinated funding efforts between federal agencies funding research and agencies funding social programs to carry out large-scale scientifically-rigorous evaluations of promising social interventions in real-world community settings (<http://www.preventionresearch.org/commlmon.php>). In collaboration with the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, members of the SPR advocacy committee have met with members of Congress and leaders in the Department of Health and Human Services over the last year to advance these efforts.

In addition, this past July Dick Spoth, who directs an Iowa State University research institute, Jennifer Lewis, Executive Director of SPR, and I presented the 2007 SPR Public Service Award to Senator Tom Harkin (Democrat, Iowa) for his support of prevention within a larger health care context. The Senator’s staff was very gracious to us and gave us over two hours of time to discuss how SPR could serve to inform related legislation and appropriations. In addition, Jennifer and I met with a staffer for Senator Sherrod Brown (Democrat, Ohio) to introduce ourselves and SPR.

The Advocacy Committee is currently chaired by Deborah Gorman-Smith (University of Illinois, Chicago). Through a Distinguished Fellow Award from the W. T. Grant Foundation, she has helped strengthen the Board’s relationship with the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, a project of the Council for Excellence in Government (www.excelgov.org/evidence). The Executive Director of the Coalition is Jon Baron who has become an active member and advisor to SPR on advocacy. A summary report on the Advocacy Committee’s strategic plan, goals and objectives will be available on the SPR website within the next few months. The Committee is working to build an infrastructure to provide timely and relevant information and resources to the broader membership to aide their participation as effective advocates for funding of prevention research. In addition to resources that will be available on the SPR website, several opportunities for advocacy training and working with policy makers will be provided, including a preconference workshop at the 2008 annual meeting. In addition, the Committee will be eliciting SPR members’ suggestions as to how SPR can better serve their needs

The other key effort, a document that defines the domains of prevention science, is in development by the Knowledge Task Group (chaired by Celine Domitrovich) under the Training Committee. It is hoped that this document will provide the foundation of training for prevention researchers and practitioners. A key member of the Task Group is John Ernst, Director of the Bureau of Prevention Research and Evidence-Based Practices of the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. John also serves as a liaison between SPR and the National Prevention Network (NPN), a group representing the prevention arm of the National

Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors. NPN represents prevention practitioners. NPN is also in the process of defining the domains of prevention practice for training and credentialing. I was able to meet with the NPN Executive Committee and members of the NPN Research and Evaluation Committee to discuss the work of the Knowledge Task Group. As a result SPR will be sharing our products with NPN. A draft of this document will be made available to the SPR membership for review and comment at the 2008 Conference in San Francisco and on the SPR website.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Zili Sloboda".

Zili Sloboda
President
(zsloboda@aol.com)

*for communications with SPR please email Jennifer Lewis at:
jenniferlewis@preventionresearch.org