

FIRMLY FOCUSED ON

THE STUDY FOR FUTURE FAMILIES

Shanna Swan lives and breathes her research ... determined to find answers to some serious questions

RECENT STUDIES suggest that an increasing number of couples are having difficulty getting pregnant, and Family Medicine Research Professor Shanna Swan is asking why. As an epidemiologist, Dr. Swan wants to determine whether environmental factors can be linked to fertility problems, so she initiated the Study for Future Families (SFF). SFF is a multimillion dollar, multi-phase project that's all about the reproductive health of families across the United States. An already energetic and highly motivated researcher, Dr. Swan grows even more enthused when

she talks about this project.

SFF Phase I, a four-year study that began in 1998 with funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH),

focuses on the man and examines the male reproductive function, including semen quality and women's time to pregnancy. Pregnant women and their partners were recruited from clinical sites in four geographic areas, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, New York City, and Columbia, to participate in this project. By the end of 2001, 700 couples had participated in SFF Phase I, and researchers are now analyzing the data.

Dr. Swan's interest in developing the second phase of SFF was triggered by recent animal studies conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The CDC found that the presence of phthalates in mothers can affect offspring.

Phthalates are used in many lotions and cosmetics, and exposure to these chemicals is high for women, especially during reproductive years. This prompted Dr. Swan to ask: Does the presence of phthalates in moms pose any risks to babies? She'll look for answers in SFF Phase II, a four-year study funded by the Environmental Protection Agency that includes moms who participated in Phase I and their babies.

Then, if she receives NIH approval, she will begin SFF Phase III. Phase III continues the research started in Phase I, except this study will also measure pesticide levels in pregnant couples. A new center will be opened in Iowa City to replace the New York City clinic. Iowa City, like Columbia, is a relatively rural area, and this will allow Dr. Swan's research team to compare samples collected from rural populations to

samples from urban populations.

All data and samples collected from Dr. Swan's research are being saved for future use, which makes the Study for Future Families even more worthwhile.

"What we're doing is building a study of families - pregnant women, partners, and children - and an archive of blood, urine, breast milk, and seminal samples that will be a valuable resource for years to come," she says with pride.

But for now, Dr. Swan is focused on the present, which includes her ongoing research as well as leadership roles in two major University of Missouri initiatives. School of Medicine Dean William Crist recently appointed Dr. Swan to serve as Associate Director of Population Science for the new Comprehensive Cancer Center. In addition, Vice Chancellor of Health Affairs Daniel Winship has asked her to co-chair a task force to develop a biostatistics-epidemiology program on the MU campus.

Dr. Swan is a nationally recognized biostatistician and epidemiologist. She has a strong work ethic and the reputation of a person who can make things happen. For these reasons, she was the ideal candidate for both appointments.

And while she is proud to contribute her time and expertise to these new and important University programs, Dr. Swan makes it clear that her research is where she "lives and breathes."

"SFF is a study that I hope will benefit all future families," she says. "It's my legacy; it's what I want to leave for future scientists and their research."



SHANNA SWAN, PhD, Department of Family and Community Medicine Research Professor

To learn more about Dr. Swan's research, please e-mail her at swans@health.missouri.edu