From the Director

Springtime is here. Finally. After a very long winter, the lilacs are blooming, and graduations are around us. It’s a time of loss and renewal. Amidst the joy of accomplishment was the loss of one of Rochester’s premier couple and family therapists: Constance Donaldson. I met Connie soon after I moved to Rochester in 1980. Neither of us was from Rochester, though it became home for both. Connie grew up on a farm in North Dakota. We worked together at what was then Western Monroe Mental Health Center (now Unity) in Brockport. Though somewhat older than I (as were most of my colleagues at that time in my life!), I taught her family therapy, and then did her supervision of supervision, along with some of her remarkable co-workers. Connie went into private practice and saw many, many individuals, couples, and families over the years. Connie and I remained friends, had many lunches, and attended various family events of each other’s. She was a trusted consultant on my most difficult cases. Several years ago, Connie developed cancer. After enduring many treatments, she died on November 24. I lost a friend and the community lost a very talented therapist. This sentence from her obituary puts it well: Connie will be remembered for her gentle and loving compassion, clear and nurturing heart, deep insights, intellectual and spiritual curiosity, and ability to recognize and appreciate the beauty in all people.

With Connie’s consent, Connie’s daughters, Judy and Andrea, established a living memorial to their mother and her work by starting a fund for the Constance O. Donaldson Family Therapy Scholarship at the Institute for the Family. We look forward to building this fund and creating a scholarship for talented family therapists who will follow in Connie’s large footsteps to make meaningful contributions of their own.

Thanks to all of you for your contributions of all kinds to the Institute. Here’s to a lengthy and beautiful Spring and Summer!

~~~ Susan McDaniel

Every family needs help sometimes.

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Special Event

“The Power and Politics of Family Mealtimes: Opportunities to Promote Health and Wellbeing”

On May 15, Barbara H. Fiese, Ph.D., clinical and developmental psychologist whose research focuses on family factors that promote health and wellbeing in children, came to talk with researchers, students, and at our Spring “Friends of the Family” event. She holds the Pampered Chef, Ltd., Endowed Chair in Family Resiliency and is Professor and Director of the Family Resiliency Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with affiliated appointments in the Departments of Pediatrics and Psychology. She is considered one of the national experts in the role that shared family mealtimes may play in promoting health. With support from the Pampered Chef, Ltd., a series of public service announcements have been developed that present solutions to common mealtime challenges and have been distributed to markets in over 48 million households nationwide.

She is a Principal Investigator or co-Investigator on multiple federally funded projects aimed at examining environmental and biological factors contributing to early nutritional health, including the STRONG Kids2 Project, which takes a cell-to-community approach to dietary habits from birth, and the ITOPP program, an innovative transdisciplinary MPH/PhD training program in obesity prevention.

She is Past-President of the Society of Family Psychology, the newly-appointed Editor of the Journal of Family Psychology, and Inaugural Editor of Advances in Child and Family Policy and Practice.

Congratulations!

Carol Podgorski, Ph.D., LMFT.
Co-Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Training Program, and now the New York State Division AAMFT President-Elect.
Faculty Profile

Lauren DeCaporale-Ryan, PhD is a senior instructor in the Departments of Psychiatry, Medicine, and Surgery. Dr. DeCaporale-Ryan serves as a resident and faculty coach to clinicians in Medicine at Highland Hospital and Surgery at Strong Memorial Hospital. In this role, she supports the facilitation and enhancement of patient-family-physician conversations, and team-based communication. As a coach, she provides one to one feedback and teaching opportunities for residents and faculty alike, supporting the URMC Patient Family Centered Care initiatives.

In addition to the above, Dr. DeCaporale-Ryan is a geropsychologist at the Institute for the Family, providing supervision to departmental fellows and developing teaching initiatives focused on the needs of older adults and families to enhance trainee learning about this growing population.

She conducts individual and family therapy at Highland Family Medicine, specializing in working with older adults, caregivers, and individuals with chronic medical illness. Her clinical work involves frequent collaboration with medical providers, and attention to life transitions, burnout, and adjustments in daily living, grief and loss.

Dr. DeCaporale-Ryan also serves as the early career representative to the Collaborative Family Healthcare Association Board of Directors. As a board member, she supports the development of programs geared toward early career psychologists and physicians finding their way and developing their professional identities in integrated clinical settings.

Research

Using Cell Phones to Prevent Teen Suicide

Reducing youth suicide has been named as a national priority for more than a decade, yet rates of youth suicide and suicide attempts have not declined. Dr. Anthony R. Pisani, Ph.D. hopes to change that. Dr. Pisani and the team he works with in Dr. Peter Wyman’s School and Community-Based Prevention program, are pursuing new models for youth suicide prevention. “When most people think about preventing suicide, they imagine intervening in a crisis or helping teenagers who are on the verge of suicidal behavior. To us, prevention means building resilience into the systems in which youth and families live to put young people on a more positive trajectory before problems emerge. Providing high-quality treatment and crisis services for severely distressed youth and families is essential, but intervening ‘upstream’ of severe problems ultimately has a greater chance of reducing youth suicide in the population”, according to Pisani.

School-based universal interventions aimed at encouraging help-seeking, increasing youth-adult communication, and strengthening healthy coping skills show promise for reducing suicide in the population. Dr. Pisani plans to enhance these promising approaches with a modern twist: mobile phone technology. Supported by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), Pisani and his research team are working with students, parents, and school stakeholders around New York State to explore safe and compelling ways to integrate text messaging into school-based prevention, including a new program to support students and parents be able to make a healthy transition from middle school to high school. Dr. Pisani’s ideas about reaching young people and their parents via mobile phones grew out of research that he and Dr. Wyman conducted in rural high schools around the state and country. “When we asked students why they turn to their phones to seek support or distraction from personal problems, they often told us it was about ‘privacy’–the safety and distance that a mobile device provides when you are feeling vulnerable.” Dr. Pisani began to imagine how mobile technologies might be used in large-scale population-based interventions to reach adolescents more broadly, more flexibly, and more intimately than any youth suicide intervention had ever been able to do. Eager to explore the potential, he sought and won a UR interdisciplinary studies grant from the Institute for the Family’s Family Research Roundtable.

Selected Publications

Hospital to Home: A Geriatric Educational Program on Effective Discharge Planning.


Clinic News

According to Tziporah Rosenberg, Ph.D., Clinic Director, Family Therapy Services is bustling with activity across all three sites! She reports that they are particularly delighted to be serving more families with children in the clinic now, due in part to a newly revitalized partnership with the Child and Adolescent Services on Science Parkway. In addition to working with children and adolescents, they are loving the enhanced focus on collaboration with child psychiatry, pediatricians, parents/family, and schools, and look forward to growing this part of their service even more in the coming year, including making the clinical space and waiting areas more child and family friendly, and offering more opportunities for child-focused interdisciplinary learning with others in the department and community.

Graduation 2014

Congratulations to our students who recently completed their Programs of Study in the Family Therapy Training Program and received their M.S. on May 17, 2014.


Pisani used this seed money from the Institute to generate plans and ideas that led to a successful grant application to the NIMH, which is now funding him to discover and test new ways to use mobile phone technology as part of a comprehensive strategy to prevent youth suicide in rural communities. For Pisani, a longtime faculty member of the Institute for the Family, seeking new avenues for reaching children and families was a natural progression of his work in primary care and other community settings the Institute is known for reaching. He explained, “Early in my training, a family therapy supervisor taught me the counter-phobic principle for working with challenging adolescents and their families—go toward the person or problem that is hardest to reach and most frightening; have courage, and find a way in. From the start of my career as a clinical psychologist, I have worked in settings where I could reach youth and families who would not otherwise receive mental health care. Using cell phones to prevent adolescent suicide continues this pattern: youth who are most at risk are least likely to ask for help, and often the hardest to engage. My current grant from NIMH will provide me with the knowledge, skills, and support I need to make scientific discoveries and ‘find a way in’ early enough to alter trajectories of risk before they reach their tragic conclusion.”