



# Pathways meets with DeBakey Principal

Sharon Wechter and Dr. Dana Smith (Executive Director of Greater Houston AHEC) met with DeBakey High School Principal Linda Lazenby on April 5th, for the purpose of reporting our progress this year with the Pathways curriculum. We will now begin creating a best process of replicating the Behavioral Health curriculum for the 2010-2011 school year with the assistance of Dean Shargey. We plan to pro-

vide training to a set of teachers in the curriculum, who would receive ongoing support from the Pathways Project Coordinator during implementation. We also plan to begin a discussion about implementing this curriculum with four other high schools in the Houston area. AHEC leadership will assist us in determining other local high schools with health track programs which would be ideal replication sites.



## Thank you, Dean Shargey!

As we approach the end of the school year, we'd like to extend a special thank you and acknowledgment of her helpful efforts, to Dean Bernice Ochoa-Shargey.

Dean Shargey has been at our side since the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, introducing the Pathways curriculum to the faculty, organizing the

implementation of the surveys and lessons, and offering her support to Sharon Wechter throughout the year. Thank you Dean Shargey for all your help!

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## Post-Test Surveys Administered to DeBakey Students



Post-test surveys have been administered to most grades at DeBakey High School, and will be completed by the end of April. Once the last post-tests are administered, Dr. Peggy Smith and Dr. Ruth Buzi of the Baylor Teen Health Clinic will evaluate the data. From the data entry process, it appears that 11th and 12th grade students may be more set in their attitudes about career

selection than younger students—indicating perhaps that future educational interventions may have more value being offered in younger high school grades. We expect to have final results by the end of May, once the data is evaluated and interpreted by Drs. Smith and Buzi; we should be able to then

determine more precisely the degree to which awareness, knowledge and attitudes are changed through educational interventions.

## New Psychiatric Nursing Rotation to begin Summer 2010



The Pathways Nursing Committee has been meeting regularly since the Fall 2009 to design a new format for a rotation which would offer students a more positive experience of psychiatric nursing. As of April 2010 we have constructed a syllabus for a ten-week rotation, to be offered to a selected

group of ten students; students have been sent applications for the new rotation. It has been planned for these students to experience the journey of the psychiatric patient: thus, beginning the first two weeks of the rotation in emergency care at Ben Taub, six weeks of inpatient care at St.

Joseph's and HCPC (three each) and the last two weeks of outpatient care at MHMRA. It is also hoped that students will be able to better understand the nature of psychiatric nursing in these various settings.

## Editorial: My Experience Teaching at DeBakey



Imagine: walking into a classroom of students, having the teacher introduce you and ask that students give you their best attention and behavior—and they *do!* As you introduce who you are, where you come from, why you're in their classroom taking time away from their lessons—students remain attentive, eager to be engaged. *This* is what teaching at DeBakey is like.

I have been a social worker and educator for over twenty years: I've taught students of all ages, children and adults; I've led family education and community programs. I've spent many years training teachers, leading professional development workshops. But I've never had so much fun as a teacher, as I've had through bringing the Pathways curriculum to DeBakey High School for Health Professions. It's not just because the students are focused on learning, although that helps. And it's not just because the teachers are caring and engaged with their students, although that obviously has a huge impact. But the DeBakey students have been eager

to engage with me in discussing the Pathways project in general, and mental health issues in specifics. They want to know what it's like to devote your life to helping others, and how does this effect you? And how does the helper help him/herself?

And how does culture effect people in choosing to seek professional help? One student spoke in front of his class, explaining that he was of Middle Eastern origin, and that several members of his family were suffering from mental illness—but seeking out help seemed to be a sign of weakness in his family and culture. Many students were eager to share such stories.

Which leads me to wonder, just how much are we paying attention to our children's mental health? We know that it's often easier to talk to a total stranger—but these students seemed hungry to share. Do we need to start thinking out of the box, beyond the school counselor's office, to explore new ways of bringing mental health *skills* to students?

—Sharon Wechter

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**The Greater Houston Area Health Education Center (AHEC)** is a non-profit organization that seeks to improve the health of our population, especially the underserved, by creating partnerships with and among community and academic organizations.

**MISSION**

Improve the health of the communities we serve (Harris, Ft. Bend, Waller and Montgomery counties) by developing a quality health workforce and helping address health needs.

**VISION**

Optimal health for all people.

**Executive Director:**

Dana S. Smith, Ph.D., LMSW, MPA

The mission of the **Network of Behavioral Health Providers, Inc.** (the Network), a non-profit organization, is to serve its members, promote the advancement of effective behavioral health services, and advocate for people in need of supports in the greater Houston community. Network members represent all aspects of mental health and substance abuse service provision including public agencies and for-profit and non-profit private organizations providing the full range of behavioral health services from prevention to crisis intervention to long-term residential care and recovery management.

**Executive Director:** Marion Coleman, Ph.D.

## Conference Presentations

Two proposals were submitted for presentation slots at major conferences this summer and both have been accepted. In June, the Pathways Project will be presented at the National AHEC Organization's annual conference in Las Vegas, June 20-24 and in July at the Texas Department of State Health Services' Texas Behavioral Health Institute conference in Austin. It is clear that the field is eager to learn about promising models in behavioral health workforce development, and we are proud to be able to offer initial significant findings on ours.

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