

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

Public Lecture

Presented by
Dr. Stephen Lewis,
Distinguished Visiting
Lecturer

Global Issues, Local Impact
Wednesday, Mar. 28, 2012
6:00 p.m.

University Centre, MPR
Fort Garry Campus

Global Health
Thursday, Mar. 29, 2012
12:00 p.m.

Frederic Gaspard Theatre A,
Basic Medical Sciences Building,
Bannatyne Campus

For more information visit:
umanitoba.ca/student/leader

Premiere Screening of:

DRIVE FOR FREE THE ALTERNATIVE FUEL REVOLUTION

A made-in-Manitoba documentary film exploring the use of and the research into alternative fuel sources in Manitoba, tracing a range of approaches from the grass roots individual endeavors to the high-tech research conducted at the University of Manitoba by David Levin, biosystems engineering and Richard Sparling, microbiology.

Wednesday, Mar. 28, 2012
at 7:00 p.m.

Robert Schultz Theatre,
172 St. John's College
Refreshments at 6:30 p.m.

For more information
contact: Crystal Jorgenson,
(204) 474-9435

The evidence is in — and online

Website provides journalists with evidence-based findings



Photo by Daniel Gwozdz

Noralou Roos, founding director of the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy, launched an online network to bridge the gap between what academics know from their research and what is reported in the news.

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS For The Bulletin

Award-winning scholar Noralou Roos learned early on how media might not always get it right.

She recalls from three decades ago how she felt a headline that ran with a story she was interviewed for misinterpreted what she had told the journalist.

"I spent the first 20 years of my career being as boring as possible whenever the media would call," says the community health sciences professor. "I certainly was not someone eager to work with them."

But fast forward to 2012 and Roos is the founder of an elaborate web-based project that reaches out to journalists writing about health policy issues. The website, EvidenceNetwork.ca, seeks to provide members of the media with the latest research findings in an easily digestible way and connect them with experts on deadline.

"Academics are always complaining that the evidence that they know from their research isn't reflected in how newspapers report on issues. And when we were talking about it, we found it's not surprising since the place that academics usually publish their research is academic journals that only other academics read," says Roos.

To create the site, Roos and co-

founder Sharon Manson Singer sought feedback from other academics in addition to journalists on how to present the evidence, ensuring the content was accessible to media without being oversimplified.

In layperson language, the site summarizes research relating to eight of healthcare's hottest topics, from wait times to the impact of an aging population. The latter, Roos notes, is frequently misrepresented in the news. Much has been predicted about the pending tsunami in healthcare costs as baby boomers age but research suggests spending will increase by only one per cent annually.

She believes misunderstandings like these happen when the media are given individual facts and fail to look at the bigger picture. And what is reported can have big ramifications. Proof of this lies in research done by Stuart Soroka (who is also a member of EvidenceNetwork.ca). He found a link over time between public concern and how much money is spent on the healthcare system.

"His evidence suggests that the media is in fact very important in how we think about many of these issues, so trying to get them accurately understood seems to be pretty important," says Roos.

It's an ongoing challenge to make sure journalists understand the site is

neutral, non-partisan and not a place where anyone "is trying to push a position," Roos says. "We are trying to get the evidence right and to make it accessible."

The network also encourages the 55 academics they have on board from across Canada to write op-eds. They work with a media specialist and a news service to help with exposure and distribution. Since launching last March, more than 65 op-eds have been published more than 130 times in various newspapers, including *The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*. The network's Twitter account has 1,700 followers and includes the country's leading health journalists.

"I think academics are finding it's an effective way to communicate," says Roos.

The project is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Manitoba Health Research Council. Roos is seeking additional funding to double the number of experts and add more topics to their database, including obesity and the effects of poverty on health. They also want to work with their journalist collaborators to develop a guide for journalism students to help them ask the right questions about health policy issues.