

## Michael Patterson's story keeps others from smoking



Michael Patterson with a visiting friend from California.

Photo courtesy of Michael Patterson

Michael Patterson went to the hospital seven months ago and all he felt was terror. He was going to die, and it was due to smoking.

Michael has end-stage COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) and emphysema, which means if he's lucky he has five years left to live. On July 18, 2008, Michael was put on life-support after a four-hour fight to regain his breath. He had no strength left to breathe on his own.

A 53-year-old Douglas resident who is half-Tlingit and half-Cherokee/Irish/English, Michael did a lot of soul-searching as he lay dying. Smoking-related cancer killed his wife three years ago, and it also killed his father and now his younger sister is in Anchorage fighting for her life. Michael didn't want to leave his 17-year-old daughter alone.

After surviving his scare, Michael worked with SEARHC Tobacco Health Educator Rowena Reeves to quit smoking for the fourth time (he had relapsed a month before going to the hospital). He also began telling his story to school children and others to try and keep them from making the same mistakes.

*"My desire to smoke is gone because of the terror of almost dying,"* Michael said. *"I'm looking for ways to help people stop smoking. I've got to do what I can to stop as many people as I can."*

A former computer tech, Michael also created an online support network, <http://howwehavequitsmoking.ning.com>, for people seeking help as they quit. (His profile is "Michael George Patterson," but a free registration is needed to see personal profiles.) The profile includes a link to a short video about his near-death experience.

*"My thinking when I was younger was, 'Who cares to be an old man?'"* he said. *"Now when I speak to the kids in school, I tell them how I thought I was hurting nobody but myself. But I deceived myself, because I am hurting other people, especially my daughter."*

Michael only has 32 percent of his lung function. Recently, he found out he is a prime candidate for lung-reduction surgery, where the worst parts of his lungs are removed so healthier parts can work better. Meanwhile Michael lives with the damage caused by smoking since age 9.

*"I'm not on oxygen, but I could die today or tomorrow,"* he said. *"If I get a cold or the flu, I'm fighting for my life."* ❀

## A Message from the President



*Alaska has a shortage of health care workers, and rural health organizations such as SEARHC feel it the most.*

*Recently, the Southeast Area Health Education Center (SE AHEC) opened at the SEARHC Human Resources office in Sitka. This is an exciting program, because it helps SEARHC and other Southeast health organizations grow their own workforces. Our partner is the Alaska Center for Rural Health, which runs the Alaska AHEC program.*

*According to a 2007 study, Alaska has a shortage of 107 family physicians, 439 registered nurses, 98 pharmacists, 71 dentists, 1,033 behavioral health workers, and hundreds of others. Some key positions, such as psychiatrists, take almost three years to fill. To provide the services our patients need, SEARHC has to hire expensive traveling providers, or locums, to fill out our staff. This costs money that should go for health services.*

*The new program allows us to build our own stable workforce. It helps us recruit local workers into health careers, especially Natives from villages. It helps us bring health students to Alaska for their clinical rotations, so they might want to work here after graduation. And it helps us retain the workers we have by providing education and networking. We are excited about working with this new program.*

*Donald Helgesen*

## SEARHC, Steps program help sponsor April health summits in Juneau, Sitka

Juneau and Sitka residents can help set their community's health priorities and honor local wellness champions during a pair of health summits in April.

SEARHC and the SEARHC Steps to a Healthier SE Alaska program teamed up with several other partners to host the inaugural Juneau Health Summit, "Pulling Together for Health." This event takes place on April 23-24 at the Tlingit-Haida Community Center, next to SEARHC at 3235 Hospital Dr.

The keynote speaker for the Juneau Health Summit is Dr. America Bracho, who is founder of Latino Health Access in California, an organization she founded in 1993 to help Latino immigrants have better access to health care and wellness programs. A big part of the success for Latino Health Access is Dr. Bracho recruits community health workers, called "Promotores de Salud," who serve as health educators and role models within their communities.

The Juneau Health Summit is modeled after the successful Sitka Health Summit, "Working Together for a Healthier Sitka." The Sitka Health Summit is entering its third year and takes place April 29-May 1 at Harrigan Centennial Hall. The keynote speaker is Judd Allen, Ph.D., who will talk about building cultures of wellness within a community. SEARHC and Steps co-host this event with other partners.

The first two Sitka Health Summits led to the creation of the Sitka Farmers Market, expansion of local community gardens (and an effort to get a community greenhouse), bicycle and pedestrian projects, support for the Hames Athletic and Wellness Center, improved school lunches and employee wellness programs.

Both events start with a community dinner the first night, which features a keynote speaker and the honoring of local wellness champions. The second day is devoted to community health planning and priority-setting. Sitka uses a third day to meet with local government officials about how to meet their health goals.

For information on both events, contact Grace Brooks at 966-8865 or [grace.brooks@searhc.org](mailto:grace.brooks@searhc.org). The Sitka Health Summit also has a Web site at <http://www.sitkahealthsummit.org/>. ❀



# SEARHC hosts new Southeast Area Health Education Center in Sitka



Iva GreyWolf, Program Director for the Southeast Area Health Education Center

SEARHC is hosting a new program designed to strengthen the health care workforce in Southeast Alaska.

The Southeast Area Health Education Center (SE AHEC) recently opened at the SEARHC Human Resources office in Sitka, and Iva GreyWolf, Ph.D., has been hired as the program's director. The SE AHEC site is one of six regional sites for the Alaska AHEC program, a partnership between the University of Alaska Anchorage School of Nursing's Alaska Center for Rural Health and other health care industry leaders around the state. The national AHEC program has sites in 45 states.

*"The AHEC program is vital to Alaska's quest to 'grow our own' health*

*care workforce,"* said Melanie Millhorn, SEARHC Director of Human Resources.

The Alaska AHEC program works to build the health care workforce by using the Three R's — Recruitment, Rotations and Retention.

The program recruits young people into the health field, especially those from rural and Native communities. It brings health students to Alaska for the clinical rotations part of their training, so students might want to settle in Alaska when they graduate. And it provides continuing education opportunities to current health care workers in remote communities, so they don't have to leave their jobs or families to get the training they need.

By increasing the number of qualified health care workers in Alaska, the AHEC program hopes to end some of the provider shortages around the state, especially in rural Alaska. The SE AHEC program is based at SEARHC's Sitka campus, but it will benefit all health care organizations throughout the region, from hospitals to private practices.

GreyWolf is a clinical psychologist and former director of the SEARHC Community Family Services program, and she is a nationally certified addictions counselor and a certified clinical supervisor. She has a Master of Arts in special education and has been a college educator. GreyWolf is from the Lac Courte Oreilles Anishinabe and Ft. Peck Assiniboine tribes in Montana, and she has won several awards for her work in the tribal health care system.

*"I have enjoyed working with the people of Southeast for a number of years and I'm excited to serve them in a new way,"* GreyWolf said. *"I have served as a clinician and an administrator, and now the opportunity to attract more people into health careers is a direction that I hope will benefit underserved populations."*

Iva GreyWolf can be reached by phone at 966-8674 or by e-mail at [iva.greywolf@searhc.org](mailto:iva.greywolf@searhc.org). To learn more about the Alaska AHEC program, go to:

<http://nursing.uaa.alaska.edu/ACRH/AHEC/default.htm>. For information about the national AHEC program, go to <http://bhpr.hrsa.gov/ahec/>. ❀

## SEARHC opens Wrangell office for WISEFAMILIES program

SEARHC now has an office in Wrangell and Tammi Meissner has been hired to manage the community's new WISEFAMILIES Through Customary and Traditional Living program.

New WISEFAMILIES programs in Wrangell and Kake are funded by a grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which modeled the programs after a similar Indian Health Service-funded WISEFAMILIES program in Klukwan. Program participants learn how to harvest and preserve traditional subsistence foods, learn Tlingit language, story-telling and other traditional activities such as carving and weaving. These traditional activities improve overall health and wellness, and research shows that a diet full of traditional foods can be a good way to prevent many chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

A lifelong Wrangell resident, Meissner graduated cum laude (with honors) from the University of Alaska Southeast-Sitka Campus with a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education. Her Tlingit name is X'atshaawditee, and she is Eagle moiety from the X'atgu Hít (Dogfish House) in the Naanyaa.aayí clan.

*"I am happy to join the SEARHC team and provide services to Wrangell,"* said Meissner, who will work with the SEARHC Diabetes Prevention and WISEWOMAN programs in addition to working with the WISEFAMILIES program. The WISEFAMILIES program also partners with Alaska Native Sisterhood Camp No. 1.

The office is located in the SNO Building, 325 Front St., in Wrangell, 99929 (P.O. Box 1411). The phone number is 874-2712 and the fax is 874-2713.

A full-time SEARHC Community Resource Program (formerly Contract Health) referral care coordinator will share office space with WISEFAMILIES, once a person is hired to fill the position. The coordinator will assist SEARHC patients with their medical appointments and travel to and from Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital in Sitka or the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage. The coordinator also assists patients needing Medicaid reservations, and works with Native patients using approved services (such as dental) through Alaska Island Community Services and Wrangell Medical Center. ❀

## Contact eases access to outside care

The SEARHC Community Resource Program (formerly Contract Health) can help Native students and travelers who need emergent or urgent care, but can't get to a tribal health facility. However, patients must communicate in order for the Community Resource Program to help pay the bills.

*"The first thing patients should do after visiting a non-tribal health care facility is call and let us know,"* said Karen Fredrickson, SEARHC Community Resource Program Manager. *"Always call. If you have questions about if something is covered or not, call me at 1-877-966-8398 before you go."*

Native patients who seek care while traveling need to call 1-866-966-8316 within 72 hours (including weekends and holidays) of any visit to a non-tribal medical provider. An elder or disabled person has 30 days to call. Family members can call for people too sick or disabled to call in on their own, but the patient has ultimate responsibility for making contact.

On the answering machine, leave your name, date of birth, your contact number, the facility visited, a contact person from that facility and the dates of your visit. You also should let the facility know you are using Native contract health services.

Native students should call the Alaska Native Medical Center Contract Health Care Services office at 1-800-478-1636 when they visit a non-tribal facility. Students have the same 72 hours (three days) to call in their visit.



## Around the Consortium

### **Juneau**

Registered participants in the Juneau WISEWOMAN cardiovascular health and Lifestyle Balance prediabetes programs are able to receive free passes to use the three-lane indoor track at the new Dimond Park Fieldhouse near Thunder Mountain High School. It usually costs \$2.50 per use of the track, or \$25 per month or \$40 for a 20-punch card. For info, call Rocky Plotnick at 364-4452 or Kim Meadows at 364-4451.

### **Angoon, Kake, Haines, Yakutat and Skagway**

The Bartlett Regional Hospital mobile mammography van will visit the communities of Angoon, Kake, Haines, Yakutat and Skagway during the months of April through June to provide breast cancer screening services. Dates still are being finalized for this partnership with the SEARHC Women's Health Program. Contact your clinic for more information and to schedule an appointment. For more info, call the SEARHC Women's Health program at 1-888-388-8782.

### **Haines**

The Haines Health Fair takes place from 7 a.m. to noon on Saturday, April 18, at the Haines Elementary School Cafeteria. For info, call Mandy Ramsey at 766-6317.

### **Sitka**

Five students from Southeast villages were in Sitka in January to complete Primary Dental Health Aide training. The five students were Shannon Spud of Klukwan, Kyla Wescott of Pelican, Kimberly Moler of Kake, Tony Stevens of Hydaburg and Nadine Blankenship of Thorne Bay, and they were taught by SEARHC dental hygienists Glennys O'Brien of Juneau and Millie Lyerly of Sitka. A Primary Dental Health Aide is the first of the five levels in the Dental Health Aide Therapist training and they provide basic prevention services.

Chuck Miller, a counselor with the Gunaanastí Bill Brady Healing Center, recently received a merit award from SEARHC for all the cultural work he's done with the SEARHC Elders Council, the Hashagoon Drum and other events around SEARHC or in Sitka.

The 2009 Ethel Lund Village Health Occupation Program has a registration deadline of March 23. The program is open to Southeast Alaska Native high school students, and takes place April 20-24 (with April 19 and 25 as travel days). Students spend a week in Sitka learning

about health careers and job-shadowing medical professionals. For more information, please contact Romee McAdams at 966-8476 or visit our Web site at <http://www.searhc.org/vhop/>.

The third annual National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is Friday, March 20, and SEARHC will be honoring those Alaska Natives, American Indians and Native Hawaiians who have been affected by HIV/AIDS with an information table at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital. For info about HIV/AIDS prevention and testing, contact Barbara Teepe, RN, at 966-8318.

### **Consortium-wide**

March is National Colorectal Cancers Awareness Month, and colon cancer occurs more often in Alaska Natives than any other ethnic group. If caught early, colorectal cancers can be stopped before they become deadly. SEARHC offers screening that can find precancerous polyps so they can be removed before they turn into cancer. To learn more, talk to your SEARHC health care provider.

### **Klawock**

The Alicia Roberts Medical Center now has a new toll-free phone number that patients can use to get information about appointments, prescriptions and other services. The new toll-free number is 1-877-755-4800.

## Patient Tip: March is National Nutrition Month

Eating healthy, nutritious foods is one of the keys to better health, but many Alaskans fall short of what they need. The American Dietetic Association sponsors National Nutrition Month each March, and this year's theme is "*Eat Right.*" Here are a few tips to help you improve your diet so you can be healthier. To learn more, go to <http://www.eatright.org/>.

- ◆ Traditional subsistence foods are healthy foods, so find ways to get more fish, wild game, berries, seaweed and other traditional foods into your daily diet. Not only are these foods healthy, but you get lots of physical activity when you gather these foods.
- ◆ Fish is an excellent source of Omega-3 fatty acids, which are healthy fats that help lower cholesterol and keep your heart healthy. Salmon, herring and halibut are some of the best sources of Omega-3 fatty acids. Herring eggs also are good sources of protein, iron and calcium.
- ◆ Most Alaskans do not eat enough fruits and vegetables each day. Try to eat about 2 1/2 cups of veggies and 1 or 2 cups of fruit every day. With fruits and vegetables, eating more matters.
- ◆ Many Alaska berries – blueberries, cranberries, strawberries, salmonberries and others – are excellent sources of disease-fighting phytochemicals and flavonoids, fiber and many vitamins. Berries freeze well, so you can save your summer harvest to eat during the winter. Add berries to your morning cereal, cookie recipes, breads and other meals.
- ◆ There are many greens found in Southeast Alaska that are good for you. Most seaweeds are edible and healthy, and so are beach asparagus, fireweed, some ferns, goose tongue, wild rhubarb, willow leaves and wild rice. You can mix these with your salad or to season other dishes.
- ◆ Leave your salt shaker in the cupboard when you cook or set the table for meals. Most people have too much salt in their diet, so find ways to season foods with pepper, garlic, curry and other herbs or spices so you don't use so much salt. Also be careful about hidden salt found in packaged foods and canned veggies (you can rinse the salt off canned green beans and other veggies to reduce the salt content).



### SEARHC uses Five R's to guide green path

Taking care of our environment is an excellent way we can improve our health. SEARHC recently started an employee Green Team to help SEARHC become a better steward of its environment. The Green Team is using the Five R's for guidance.

- ◆ **Respect** — Make sure your choices show RESPECT for the land or environment and limit their impacts.
- ◆ **Reduce** — Reduce the amount of goods, packaging, chemicals, energy consumption and other items you use.
- ◆ **Reuse** — Find ways to REUSE items (example, printing on both sides of the paper).
- ◆ **Recover** — You can RECOVER many parts of an item before it goes to the landfill (example, recover working parts from an old car).
- ◆ **Restore** — Use materials or products that RESTORE damaged environmental, social and economic systems in your area.

Find it @ [www.searhc.org](http://www.searhc.org)

**The SEARHC Women, Infants, Children (WIC) program recently revamped its quarterly publication, "SEARHC Family Wellness."**

The publication provides families with helpful information about nutrition, physical activity and other health and wellness related issues.

WIC is a state and national nutrition program that helps pregnant women, new parents and young children learn about nutrition and how to prepare healthier meals. The WIC program also helps low-income parents get healthy foods for their families. SEARHC provides WIC services throughout all of Southeast Alaska, except Metlakatla. SEARHC has WIC offices in Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan that provide services from Yakutat to Hyder.

To learn more about the WIC program and eligibility, go to <http://www.searhc.org/wic/>.

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