

# Enhancing Diversity in Tobacco-Related Disease Research

## The Cornelius Hopper Award Supplements

by Shana Amenaghwon, M.P.A.

California's diverse populations present both unique challenges and valuable opportunities for tobacco-related disease research. California is literally teeming with special populations. California is rapidly becoming majority Latino, a heterogeneous group of cultures and smoking traditions from throughout South America, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. Moreover, there are significant Asian populations including Chinese, Filipinos, Vietnamese, Hmong, Koreans and a growing number of persons from the Indian sub-continent. California is also home to the largest urban American Indian and African immigrant populations in the United States. California's Russian population is also significant, representing the second greatest concentration of this group in the United States. Each of these diverse populations have varied and diverse tobacco use traditions and disease incidences that need to be explored.

Unfortunately, researchers with personal experience in these communities or those who are currently focusing their research in these areas are few and far between. Recognizing the inherent need for scientific talent to address the concerns of under-represented communities, TRDRP created the Cornelius Hopper Diversity Award Supplements (CHDAS) in 2000 to honor the legacy of Dr. Cornelius L. Hopper, former Vice President of Health Affairs, University of California, Office of the President (UCOP).

### The Legacy

Dr. Cornelius L. Hopper, the first African-American Vice President of the UCOP, retired after a 20-year tenure spanning from 1979 to 2000. Initially, he was the Special Assistant to the President, and three years later he was named the Vice President of Health Affairs. Dr. Hopper earned his M.D.



**Dr. Cornelius L. Hopper**

Vice President—Health Affairs, Emeritus

degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. After training in internal medicine, neurology and several years as a faculty member in the Department of Neurology at the University of Wisconsin, he became the Vice President for Health Affairs at Tuskegee Institute in 1971, where he created the first National Health Service Corps Field Station in the southeastern United States and the first rural community based area health education center.

During his tenure as the Vice President for Health Affairs at UCOP, Dr. Hopper was responsible for a system of 14 health professions schools, five major teaching hospitals and a budget of more than \$2.5 billion. He was instrumental in establishing statewide research programs in AIDS, geriatrics, breast cancer and tobacco-related diseases that awarded more than \$300 million to California researchers. He also developed the Wellness Lecture Series and coordinated the expansion of primary care training opportunities in the UC system. He has served on a variety of boards including the Board of Regents at

Oakland's Samuel Merritt College, and he is a California Health Manpower Policy Commissioner. Most recently he has evaluated a number of post-Soviet hospital partnerships established by the American International Health Alliance with USAID funding.

### The Award

The overall aim of the CHDAS award is to enhance the trainees' experience and qualification for tobacco research careers and to expand and strengthen the infrastructure for tobacco research in California by assisting the development of research, including historically under-represented communities. Currently active TRDRP funded principal investigators are encouraged to mentor qualified trainees with this \$15,000 supplement. To date, TRDRP has funded 30 CHDAS awards to 25 principal investigators at 14 institutions totaling \$764,272. (See [www.trdrp.org](http://www.trdrp.org) "CHDAS Awardees" for the complete list.)

### The CHDAS Experience

Recipients receive invaluable experience and exposure to research of tobacco-related diseases, and many have used the award as a means to further their career and educational goals. Not only do the CHDAS recipients benefit from the award, the principal investigators also benefit by the opportunity to augment their staff support assisting the progress of their research. Here are just a few of their stories:

Cara Booker, one of the program's first year recipients in 2000, worked with Dr. Jennifer Unger on her TRDRP supported project entitled "Acculturation, media, peers, parents and adolescent smoking" at University of Southern California (USC). She applied for the award as a public health master's candidate and indeed earned her M.P.H. with an emphasis on biostatistics and epidemiology in 2003. She is now in a

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## CHDAS

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Ph.D. program at USC where she continues her research and expects to graduate in the spring of 2005. Her dissertation will be a cross national/cross-cultural study focusing on stressful life events and adolescent smoking. She is awaiting the peer-reviewed publication of her manuscript where she is the first author and has several more possible publications in progress. She explains, "I feel that the CHDAS was really instrumental in allowing me to discover ... my passion in the public health and research field."

Dr. Unger explains, "One of the best features of the CHDAS program is that it helps graduate students carve out their own research niches. Graduate students typically work as research assistants on our TRDRP-funded projects, but usually it's not until the dissertation stage that they have the opportunity to propose and test their own hypotheses. The CHDAS program gives them the opportunity to pursue their own ideas, while they still have support from the PI and resources of the parent grant...Cara's dissertation is a direct extension of our TRDRP research...The CHDAS award gave her an excellent introduction to tobacco research. I'm confident that she will become a leader in the field."

Darya Soto, M.D. was a 2001 CHDAS recipient training under the direction of Dr. George Caughey on his TRDRP supported project entitled, "Human tryptase gene expression: Role in COPD" at the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. Soto applied for the 2001 CHDAS as a practicing physician seeking to expand her career in lung cancer research. She is currently an assistant adjunct professor of medicine at UCSF department of medicine researching lung cancer using mouse models of adenocarcinoma. She has received other grants since her CHDAS. Most recently, she received a Faculty Development Award from the National Cancer Institute. Dr. Soto states, "The award and mentoring by Dr. Caughey did assist in my career development. They aided in initiating my current research studies."

Dr. Caughey adds, "The CHDAS

program provides a terrific opportunity for established investigators in tobacco-related disease to incubate the interest and careers of individuals not adequately represented in this field. CHDAS support was just what Dr. Soto needed to jump-start her career in lung cancer research and to obtain the results needed to win larger-scale, longer-term support from the National Cancer Institute."

Andrea Castillas, a 2002 CHDAS recipient worked under the mentorship of Dr. Randolph Hastings on his TRDRP support project entitled, "Novel regulatory mechanisms for lung cancer growth" at the Veterans Medical Research Foun-

and lung cancer. As a result, this award has given me the opportunity to meet and collaborate with leading researchers in the area of lung cancer. In the laboratory, it has assisted me in learning new techniques such as immunohistochemistry, quantitative real time PCR and ...[data] collection methods in clinical research."

Dr. Hastings further explains, "The obvious benefit of the award for me as a principal investigator was to provide support for a qualified individual to work in my laboratory. Andrea began in the lab with a project for her post-baccalaureate program. The supplement

## LOOKING FORWARD

*TRDRP is proud of this award and is especially proud of and salutes all of the Cornelius Hopper awardees and their mentors. We urge TRDRP principal investigators to mentor all individuals who are interested in pursuing tobacco-related disease research and to encourage qualified individuals to apply for Cornelius Hopper Diversity Award Supplements. Applications for these awards will be invited in the 3rd week of April 2005. Please visit [www.trdrp.org](http://www.trdrp.org) for CHDAS application requirements.*

ation of San Diego. Andrea applied as a UCSD Human Development B.A. graduate with a minor in biology interested in the biological sciences and exploring M.D. and Ph.D. programs.

She continues to work with Dr. Hastings and is also a hospital assistant at the UCSD student-run free clinic teaching medical student's clinical laboratory, where part of her work is on tobacco-related diseases such as lung cancer. She has received an NIH Minority International Research Training Program Scholarship, which has given her additional experience in biomedical research. She is currently applying to medical schools with research opportunities. Andrea states, "I am very thankful that Dr. Hastings gave me the opportunity to apply for this award... working with Dr. Hastings inspired me to follow a career in research...As a recipient of the award, Dr. Hastings has sent me to [attend] symposiums, meetings, and conferences to learn more about research

allowed her to continue working, to learn more, and to develop additional techniques in that project for a longer period of time. In addition, she could spend more hours in that lab because of the financial support. Because she wrote the application for CHDAS (with my help), she had a larger stake and sense of ownership of her project than she might have felt if I had simply hired her as an employee. Finally, the opportunity to go to the TRDRP meetings and present her findings was a valuable experience. The process of applying for the award was straightforward, and I would encourage other investigators to apply if they have appropriate candidates."

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