

Scientists and grantees enjoy high profile at EHC summit

By Eddy Ball

Scientists supported by NIEHS were prominent on the program for the 7th annual Environmental Health Summit Nov. 4-5 in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina.

Meeting at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center, attendees explored the implications of “[Exposure Science in the 21st Century: Role of Citizens and Communities.](#)”

(<http://environmentalhealthcollaborative.org/summit/summit-2014>)

The summit was organized by the [Research Triangle Environmental Health Collaborative](#)

(<http://environmentalhealthcollaborative.org/about/overview/>)

with support from NIEHS, area universities, and other groups concerned with environmental health.

Although the meeting highlighted three specific areas during its extended workgroup discussions — technology, data integration, and risk communication — the program was united by the theme of community engagement as the driver for study design, data collection and return, and translation of community-based environmental health research. This new approach is quickly effacing the conventional academic top-down focus on researcher interests and priorities, such as publications and tenure, in community-based environmental health research projects.

The plenary speakers and workgroup panelists echoed a telling comment from the first morning by NIEHS grantee [Erin Haynes, Dr.P.H.](#),

(http://www.eh.uc.edu/dir_individual_details.asp?qcontactid=687)

an associate professor at the University of Cincinnati. “Environmental health research should be conducted with members of the community — not on them,” she explained. “I see myself in collaboration with them [from planning to completion of the research project].”

Lessons from the report

A major inspiration for the summit was the 2012 report by a special committee of the National Academy of Sciences, [Exposure Science in the 21st Century: A Vision and a Strategy.](#)

(http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=13507)

On hand to describe the background and conclusions of the report was the first plenary speaker of the summit, committee member [Paul Gilman, Ph.D.](#),

(<http://www.covanta.com/en/about-covanta/management/corporate/paul-gilman.aspx>)

senior vice president and chief sustainability officer for Covanta Energy.

Not surprisingly, Gilman focused his talk on chapter six of the report, “Promoting and Sustaining Public Trust in Exposure Science.” No matter how ambitious the project or how elegantly fit-for-use the technology employed, Gilman said, “We cannot reach the vision [of meaningful exposure science research] without trust.... Communities are not just where we do science, but the key to whether and how we do it.”

Exposure science at NIEHS

After nearly a full first day of workgroup discussions, the meeting convened for two more plenary talks on day two by NIEHS Deputy Director Richard Woychik, Ph.D., and Duke University Cancer Center Deputy Director Steven Patierno, Ph.D.

[Woychik](#) discussed “NIEHS: Where Exposure and Citizen Science Meet” with an overview of NIEHS programs promoting the development of leading-edge monitoring technology, community-based participatory research, environmental justice, and a better understanding of the concept of the exposome. He tied work underway by the National Toxicology Program (NTP), which is headquartered at NIEHS, the NIEHS Superfund Research Program, and the NIEHS Exposure Biology Program to the institute’s strategic plan.

Throughout his talk, Woychik underscored the NIEHS commitment to advancing community-engaged research for improving public health.

Risk and translation — the urban epidemic of prostate cancer

In his talk, [Patierno](#)

(<http://www.dukecancerinstitute.org/research/about-dci/news-and-awards/patierno-named-deputy-director>)

discussed “Innovation in Environmental Health Sciences: The Intersection Between Community Engagement and the Human Exposome.” He described how community engagement drives a broad spectrum of laboratory, population level, and health services research conducted by him at Duke and with a cohort of 6,000 African-American males in Washington, D.C. on prostate cancer risk and outcomes.

With interests in epidemiology, gene-environment interactions, health disparities, and global health, Patierno conveyed his enthusiasm for a trans-disciplinary approach and the challenges of uncovering meaningful environmental exposures that threaten health. “There’s an enormous amount of information that we need new technologies to process,” he said.

Linked Video

[Watch an interview with Patierno about his group’s outreach and community-engagement efforts to prevent disease in Washington, which he describes as a cancer disaster area \(15:04\)](#)

As part of its mission as a clearinghouse for environmental health information, the Environmental Health Collaborative has posted presentations and working group recommendations online. Materials are available for each of the seven environmental health summits it has organized since the first one of the series in 2008.



1/10

According to Woychik, NIEHS has supported community-engaged research for more than 20 years and is leading efforts to integrate data collection and databases to make findings more useful in efforts to promote public health. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



2/10

NIEHS program analyst Kimberly Thigpen Tart, J.D., center, talked with collaborative administrator David Brown during a break between presentations. Tart was one of four NIEHS representatives on the summit planning committee. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



3/10

NTP Office of Nomination and Selection Director Scott Masten, Ph.D., keeps in touch with his office between sessions. Masten was also a member of the planning committee. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



4/10

NIEHS grantee Kim Anderson, Ph.D., contributed information about communication strategies and monitoring technology, based on her field research in Louisiana during the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and at fracking sites in Ohio. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



5/10

Duke University visiting scholar and collaborative co-chair William Ross introduced Patierno. In his previous career as head of the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Ross worked with NIEHS on the Environmental Stewardship Initiative. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



6/10

Patierno studies the social and economic, as well as genomic and epigenomic, aspects of risk for cancer. "Poverty is a carcinogen," he said of the alarming rates of prostate cancer among African-American men. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



7/10

NIEHS program analyst and planning committee member Liam O'Fallon, left, talked with Haynes about her community-engaged study of the health effects of fracking in Appalachian Carroll County, Ohio. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



8/10

Head of the NIEHS Exposure, Response, and Technology Branch David Balshaw, Ph.D., left, offered his insights from working with grantees developing increasingly sophisticated and lightweight exposure monitors. He was also part of the planning committee. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



9/10

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency scientific administrators Jennifer Orme-Zavaleta, Ph.D., and Hal Zenick, Ph.D., shared efforts at the agency to build infrastructure for community-based research. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)



10/10

Community-engaged researchers often describe their methodology and technology goals as fit-for-purpose. The same might be said about the summit's venue, where setting encouraged the collaboration, communication, and divergent thinking required for bold initiatives. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

The Environmental Factor is produced monthly by the [National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences \(NIEHS\)](http://www.niehs.nih.gov/)

(<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>)

, Office of Communications and Public Liaison. The content is not copyrighted, and it can be reprinted without permission. If you use parts of Environmental Factor in your publication, we ask that you provide us with a copy for our records. We welcome your [comments and suggestions](#). (bruskec@niehs.nih.gov)

This page URL: NIEHS website: <http://www.niehs.nih.gov/>

Email the Web Manager at webmanager@niehs.nih.gov