

HEALTH & WELLNESS

Healthbeat

ALS Registry Act signed

The ALS Association and people living with Lou Gehrig's Disease across the country celebrated a tremendous victory as President Bush signed into law S. 1382, the ALS Registry Act, in the late afternoon on Wednesday, Oct. 8.

The registry would establish the first ever national patient registry of people with Lou Gehrig's Disease, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, to be administered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The registry would collect information leading to the cause, treatment and cure of the deadly neurological disease that took the life of baseball legend Lou Gehrig in 1941.

The ALS Association has been working with Congress for nearly four years to pass the ALS Registry Act, which was first introduced in 2005 by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Senator John Warner (R-VA) and U.S. Representatives Eliot Engel (D-NY) and Lee Terry (R-NE). Thanks to their leadership, the bill passed the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives with near unanimous support in late September.

Nursing honor goes to Whitaker

Dr. Von Best Whitaker, a research associate professor at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University School of Nursing, has been named the 2008 Research Nurse of the Year by the North Carolina Nurses Association (NCNA). She was recognized at the NCNA annual convention in Winston-Salem Oct. 1-3.

In addition, a manuscript written by Whitaker and a South Carolina State University colleague, investigating the elimination of health care disparities won the manuscript of the year from the American Society of Ophthalmic Registered Nurses/American Academy of Ophthalmology.



Whitaker

In collaboration and partnership, Whitaker shared with the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, a five-year \$2.3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to create a Center on Health Disparities Research at N.C. A&T School of Nursing. She serves as primary investigator and co-director of the center.

Whitaker is a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing and serves on its Expert Panel on Cultural Competence. She is a member of the Moses Cone-Wesley Long Community Health Foundation Advisory Board and also serves on the boards of several other community philanthropic organizations.

The North Carolina Nurses Association is the only professional nurses association that represents all registered nurses in the state.

Foundation grant for A&T

Jeffrey A. Edwards and Lyubov A. Kurkalova, both associate professors in the department of Economics and Finance at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, received a three and a half year research grant from the National Science Foundation in the amount of \$747,528 to study changing societal attitudes towards water scarcity as affected by ethanol production and increasing groundwater depletion of the Ogallala aquifer.

Undergraduate students from the School of Business and Economics and Ph.D. students from the Energy and Environmental Studies interdisciplinary program will participate in the research. The project will involve collaboration with geographers and survey specialists from Texas Tech University and Angelo State University.

Latina Girls Magazine talks back to Palin on abstinence stance

AUSTIN, Texas — Latinitas, (www.latinitasmagazine.org) the first digital magazine made for and by Hispanic girls, knows firsthand the effects of abstinence only sex-education, being America's sub-group that experiences the highest level of teen pregnancy than any other community in the United States.

According to the U.S. Census bureau, 53 percent of Hispanic teens get pregnant at least once before age 20, which is nearly twice the national average. Research also shows that 69 percent of those teenage moms end up dropping out of high school.

Girls who contribute to Latinitas magazines are concerned about GOP Vice Presidential-candidate Gov. Sarah Palin's abstinence-only in sexual education stance, despite her own 17 year old daughter's pregnancy.

"The abstinence policy that Palin supports didn't work in her own home, yet she expects people to believe that it will work for others, who have even more limited access to reproductive health services," said Latinitas' editor Laura Donnelly.

Magna Ramos, a junior reporter for the magazine who participates in Latinitas' after school programs in Austin, added: "They need to teach us about [sex ed] because if we don't know about it, how can we prevent it [pregnancy]."

According to the U.S. Census bureau Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., and Texas boasts the highest rates of teen pregnancy in the country and coincidentally employs abstinence-only sex education in schools statewide.

Program aims to better treat local athletes

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

A new Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center program has been designed to assess and manage sports-related concussions.

The program will incorporate ImPACT, a neurocognitive test that grew out of a decade of university-based research. The 20-minute test documents and evaluates verbal and visual memory, attention span, brain-processing speed, reaction time and post-concussion symptoms. It has already been implemented at the high school, collegiate and professional levels of sports.

With ImPACT, Dr. Daryl Rosenbaum, an assistant professor of Family and Community Medicine who is specially trained in sports medicine, said athletes can establish their baseline cognitive status with the computerized test. They can take a quicker sideline test, if needed, or the computerized testing may be given following a concussion to track recovery. A patient with a suspected concussion can take the test before a physician examination, giving the physician additional information. If the player has had a previous baseline test, results from both tests will be compared.

It is a new approach, since physicians often rely on observations and symptoms that the patient reports to

diagnose a concussion.

"This gives us an additional tool to objectively evaluate a player's cognitive status, their recovery and whether or not they can return safely to sports," Rosenbaum said.

Rosenbaum and Dr. Jong-Yeol Kim, assistant professor of neurology, are co-directors of the sports concussion program. The concussion program at Wake Forest Baptist was developed by physicians from sports medicine and neurology who serve as team doctors for Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem State University, the Twin City Cyclones, the Winston-Salem Warhogs, University of North Carolina School of the Arts dancers, as well as multiple local high schools.

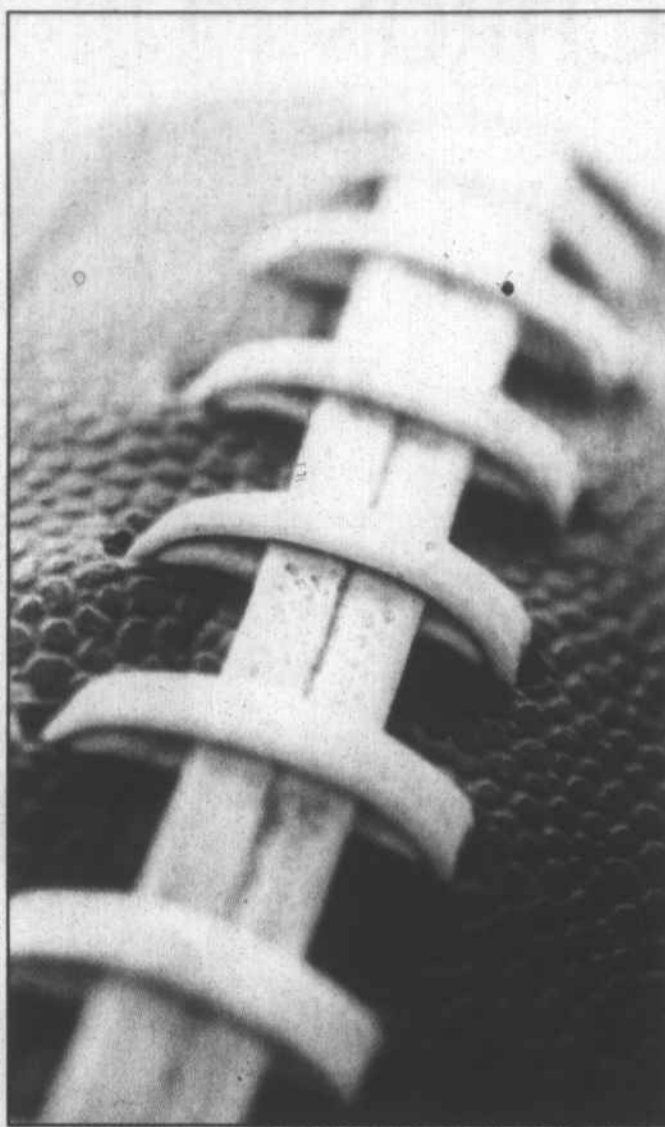
The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates as many as 3.8 million concussions occur in the United States each year.

Rosenbaum is conducting a class at BestHealth, the community resource center at Hanes Mall, at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Nov. 4, titled "Confused About Concussions?" It will include an explanation of the technology and procedures that enhance diagnosis and treatment of this common injury.

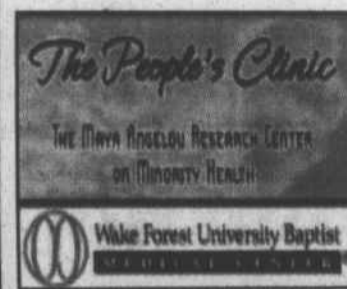
For more information about sports medicine and the concussion program, go to the Web site at wfubmc.edu/sportsmedicine/.



Rosenbaum



Drug Abuse: The Deadly Truth



Americans reported using illicit drugs at some point during their lives, and 16 percent report using during the last year. What is even scarier is that almost 27 percent of African American young people between the ages of 12 and 17 report using drugs at some point in their lifetime.

It is essential that we work together to decrease the rates of drug use in our community. We must educate ourselves so we are better able to prevent drug abuse, recognize its signs when it does occur, and help those who suffer from addiction find appropriate treatment.

What is drug abuse?

Drug abuse is defined as the use of illegal drugs or the abuse of prescription or over-the-counter drugs for purposes other than for what they are given or in amounts other than directed. Common illicit (illegal) drugs include marijuana, cocaine ("crack" and other forms), heroin, and crystal methamphetamine ("ice"). Sedatives, tranquilizers, and pain medications are frequently abused prescription drugs.

Drug abuse over a period of time can develop into drug addiction. Drug addiction is a complex brain disease that consists of drug craving, physical dependence (needing a drug to function in daily life), and drug use that can persist even in the face of dangerous or life-threatening risks. Drug-seeking behavior often becomes compulsive, which causes many people to resort to unhealthy and unsafe behaviors, such as violence or prostitution, to "feed" their addiction.

See Drugs on A13



Halloween safety tips

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Halloween is an exciting time of year for kids. To ensure children have a safe holiday, Brenner Children's Hospital and the American Academy of Pediatrics offer the following safety tips:

- Create a costume from fire-retardant material. If you are going to purchase a costume, buy one that is flame-resistant.
- Make sure the costume is short enough so that children don't trip.
- Use face paint and hats rather than masks. Loose-fitting masks with small eyeholes can obstruct a child's vision. Secure hats tightly so they don't slip over your child's eyes.
- Children who will be trick-or-treating after dusk should have reflective tape on their costumes and carry flashlights with fresh batteries. Make sure swords and other props are flexible.
- Dress children in comfortable shoes that fit. Adult-size shoes can cause blistering or make a child trip and fall.
- Small children should never carve pumpkins. Children can draw a face with markers. Parents can do the cutting. Under parents' supervision, children ages 5 to 10 can carve with pumpkin cutters equipped with safety bars. Votive candles are safest for candle-lit pumpkins.
- Lighted pumpkins should be placed on a sturdy table, away from curtains and other flammable objects, and should never be left unattended.
- Serve kids a healthy dinner (with foods they like) before trick-or-treating, so they won't fill up on candy.
- Offer trick-or-treaters something other than candy. Give them colorful pencils, stickers, large erasers or decorative shoelaces.
- Set a number of days that candy can remain in the house before it gets thrown out.
- Children shouldn't snack while they're trick-or-treating.
- Parents should check treats at home.
- Watch for signs of tampering, such as small pinholes in wrappers and torn or loose packages.
- Parents of young children should get rid of choking hazards such as gum, peanuts, hard candies or small toys.
- To keep their home safe for visiting trick-or-treaters, parents should remove anything a child could trip over such as garden hoses, toys, bikes and lawn decorations.
- Parents should check outdoor lights and replace burned-out bulbs.
- Wet leaves should be swept from sidewalks and steps.



UNCG: Grueling hours take toll on nurses

CHRONICLE STAFF REPORT

A local professor is studying how the long, grueling hours worked by nurses impacts their health and ability to perform their jobs.

Dr. Susan Letvak, a professor of nursing at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, has won a highly competitive \$264,106 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to probe the subject.

While doctors' health and work environment has garnered a great deal of attention, Letvak says, nurses have been overlooked.

"No one has really looked at this before," she said. "We're one of the first teams to look at the link between nurses' health and the care they provide."

UNCG awarded Letvak a \$5,000 research grant to complete preliminary research. She used the money to conduct personal interviews with 14 RN's working with their own health problems in North Carolina hospitals. What she found was a proliferation of chronic musculoskeletal problems (caused by lifting patients) alongside depression. Several of the nurses did not disclose their health prob-



lems to their managers and even insisted on meeting outside of the towns they are work-

ing in because they feared their health problems might cost them their jobs.

"We need research to speak for them, to initiate policies and changes. Nurses at the bedside don't have the power to change practice," Letvak says.

Valuing older nurses for their experience rather than their brawn would benefit nurses, patients and hospitals, Letvak says.

"We're losing our experience, and nothing's being done to assist an older nurse. A healthy work environment for an older nurse is a healthy work environment for a younger nurse."

Now, armed with the Robert Wood Johnson grant, Letvak will survey 2,500 RN's working in hospitals across the state. She will also conduct focus groups for nurses working with health problems, their healthy co-workers and nurse managers to get an accurate picture of "the whole dynamic."

She wants to use what she learns to improve working conditions for Registered Nurses, the majority of whom work exhausting 12-hour shifts, care for too many patients and are expected to compete physically with their younger counterparts.