

## Pilot Projects Get Boost from Betty Gray Rural Health Research Development Fund

BY LEE LEWIS - HUSK

Giving seed money to support a researcher's idea is a bit analogous to dipping a toe in the water. It's a way to decide whether you want to commit yourself to full immersion. So go pilot studies at many universities where a pilot may lead to full-fledged funding (or not). The newly launched Betty Gray Rural Health Development Fund is giving money to faculty to develop ideas and programs that may lead to sustainable programs for the future.

Administered through the Office of Rural Health Research in the OHSU School of Nursing, the program has \$50,000 a year to support pilot studies. This year, the office funded three:

**Preventing obesity in rural school children:** Nancy Findholt, Ph.D., R.N., assistant professor, La Grande campus, is teaming up with a school district in eastern Oregon to prevent obesity in children. She will build a community-based collaboration around this priority and will gather community information on factors that promote or are barriers to optimal nutrition and activity for children in this rural part of the state. Her intent is to use data from the pilot study to develop a school- and community-based intervention to prevent childhood obesity.

**Toxicity from low-dose pesticides in rural communities:** Anne Greenlee, Ph.D., associate professor, La Grande campus, is doing basic research on the effects of pesticides on development, using a mouse model – an important project because of the high use of pesticides in rural communities and the possible adverse effects on pregnancy and in children. (see story, page 12)

**Energy balance among rural adults:** Kerri M. Winters, Ph.D., assistant professor, Portland campus, hopes to learn more about eating and activity patterns among rural adults in Oregon. To get answers, she will survey adults about their health behaviors and physical functioning. She will also lead a team to collect objective

measures of physical fitness, function and health.

The Office of Rural Health boasts several projects that have reached the next level of support, including a study funded by the National Institute of Nursing Research that looks at the structure and process of medication safety in rural assisted-living settings. “We have eight participating rural sites in Oregon and Washington,” says principal investigator and Office of Rural Health Research director Heather Young, Ph.D., G.N.P., F.A.A.N. Other investigators in the two-year study include Suzanne Sikma, Ph.D., R.N., and Juliana Cartwright, Ph.D., R.N., associate professor, Ashland campus. Cartwright leads an additional NINR-funded study that aims to improve end-of-life care coordination and delivery in assisted living facilities.

With funding from the National Cancer Institute, Jill Bennett, Ph.D., R.N., C.N.S., associate professor, Portland campus, has her eye on rural adults who don't make physical exercise a priority in their lives. She is trying to find out whether it's possible to coax them into more physical activity through telephone coaching. “Telephone coaching is one approach to the challenge of providing expert health behavior counseling to residents of small rural communities,” says Bennett. Telephone coaches will try to motivate study participants to choose their preferred type of activities, set their own goals and resolve issues that arise.

“Poverty, lack of resources and access to health services, inadequate transportation, and out-migration are common issues in rural communities where a higher proportion of older adults reside,” says Young. “This is where gerontological nursing and rural health come together. Our goal is to look at a ways we can promote health at the level of individuals and families as well as with communities and health systems. We're partnering with schools, assisted living facilities and communities so we work together to create solutions that promote health.” ▢