

MAPPING

a program to meet the needs of
all patients, young and old

A Prescription *for the Duration*

Health Scientists Strive for a Lifetime of Preventive Care



Every year, an increasing number of babies come into the world prematurely. Fortunately, advances in obstetric and neonatal care allow doctors to nurture to full term more and more of these and other severely underdeveloped infants. Recent research has given doctors and nurses another way to boost the odds of long-term survival, through better access to one of the most wholesome medicines in the world—breast milk.

Providing mothers' breast milk is the best way to help premature infants get the nutrition and disease protection they require to thrive, so a University of Iowa Health Care team under the direction of Ekhard Ziegler, professor of pediatrics and head of the Fomon Infant Nutrition Unit, worked to establish the Mother's Milk Bank of Iowa. Expected to open late in 2002, the bank will be the first in the state and one of only six in the nation to provide pasteurized donor human milk to at-risk infants in need.

"Mothers' milk contains elements that cannot be manufactured, or even identified, and it helps with every developmental outcome," says Jean Drulis, a program associate in pediatrics and codirector of the infant nutrition division of University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. "We're working to make sure the little ones get all the help they need."

A milk bank functions much like a blood bank, providing a safe product selected from donors who must meet rigorous health prerequisites. The Mother's Milk Bank of Iowa will follow guidelines set by the Human Milk Banking Association of North America. Milk banks already in operation are located in Austin, Texas; Denver, Colo.; Newark, Del.; Raleigh, N.C.; and San Jose, Calif. The milk at Iowa's bank is currently available only to premature babies under care at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

"We hope to bring the bank to premature babies across the state someday," Drulis says. "Every conscientious caregiver, of course, wants to make the best care available to every patient, young or old."

Care of the elderly patient is an especially pertinent topic in Iowa, home to a large elderly population and the highest proportion of the population over age 85 in the United States. Under the auspices of the nursing and dental colleges, several work groups made up of University faculty, nurses, and doctors have been addressing issues surrounding geriatric nursing and oral health care.

The demand for dental care among the elderly will only rise as the population ages, says Howard Cowen, associate professor of preventive and community dentistry and

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director of the Special Care Program in the College of Dentistry. Cowen relies on a special vehicle to take care of that need. Two years ago, the American Dental Association honored the dental college's Geriatric Mobile Dental Unit with its top award for geriatric care. The 30-foot motor home hauls the program's equipment from place to place.

The unit visits 10 nursing homes within a 40-mile radius of the University, as well as a number of homebound hospice patients and elderly adults. It is both an educational resource and a service program, treating patients while offering senior dental students hands-on clinical experience. The unit spends up to eight weeks seeing patients at each site, and each facility on the unit's route can expect



a return visit every 15 to 18 months. Between visits, dental hygienists travel to the facilities to offer regular teeth cleanings every six months.

"These programs aim to help dental students feel comfortable working with different types of patients in hopes they will continue caring for them once they graduate and enter practice," Cowen says.

A new program in the College of Nursing also trains students in the best practices for geriatric care. Established in January 2001 through a \$1.33 million grant from the John A. Hartford Foundation, the Iowa Hartford Center of Geriatric Nursing Excellence has implemented initiatives in research, education, nursing practice, and health policy to improve the quality of nursing care for older people.

"In a very real sense this designation recognizes the excellence Iowa has achieved in gerontological nursing," professor of nursing and center coinvestigator Kathleen Buckwalter says, noting that *U.S. News & World Report* ranked the college's gerontology nurse practitioner program fourth in the country based on a national survey.

"Iowa has the largest number of long-term care beds per capita in the United States," Buckwalter says. "It only makes sense to improve the quality of care in nursing homes, even as we work to support the best possible care for elders living at home and in other institutional and noninstitutional settings."

Above: Professor Howard Cowen (at left), director of the College of Dentistry's Special Care Program, wants his students to be ready for the rising demand for dental care from Iowa's growing elderly populations. Left: According to Professor Ekhard Ziegler, mothers' milk is disease-fighting food for premature newborns like Leigh Ann, daughter of Brenda and Gary Jecklin, of Durango.

