

TANG CENTER

# BEAR TALK

NEWS AND INFORMATION FROM UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES



## Inside:

Advice on calling the advice nurse

How anxious is too anxious?

Profiles of three student health educators

*New Column!*



## My laptop is great. But is it good for me?

*Tang Center physical therapist Mary Popylisen answers questions about ergonomics.*

**Q: I spent a lot of money on ergonomic equipment and my hand still hurts.... What's going on?**

A: There may be two things going on. First, Posture! Posture! Posture! Your mother was right!!! No matter how good your equipment is—even if it is set up specifically for you—if you have poor posture or don't take breaks, you are at risk for pain or injury. Second, there is a lot of "ergonomic" equipment out there with no rules or regulations about what is called "ergonomic." Just because something is labeled "ergonomic" doesn't mean it is right for you or your body type. The best equipment allows you to maintain good posture. The primary things to remember are: shoulders relaxed, back straight, wrists neutral, and limited reaching.

**Q: My laptop is great. I take it everywhere. Is that OK?**

A: Laptops are convenient; however, they pose a couple of hazards. Many of you already have heavy backpacks; the laptops make them heavier and can create neck or back stress. Also, laptops have small keyboards and screens, making it hard to position yourself with good posture. We recommend that people who use laptops as their primary computer get an external mouse and keyboard and use the laptop as the screen. Also, when using the laptop as a screen, prop the laptop up on a couple of books to get the screen height toward eye level.

**Q: I have to work at my computer a few hours a day. Are there simple exercises for me to do while I am taking a break?**

A: Breaks are great!...We recommend taking a break at least every hour for a few minutes. You can find a whole list of exercises on the website [see web address at end of article]. A quick exercise that we like is the wall angel. You stand with your back against the wall, walk

*See "Ask the Expert," pg. 4*

## Tang Center Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

University Health Services is celebrating its tenth anniversary in the Tang Center, which opened its doors in January, 1993. Formerly housed in Cowell Hospital, located where the Haas School of Business now stands, UHS has enjoyed a full decade of residing in the modern building designed especially for its multidisciplinary approach to health care.

You're wondering how the Tang Center got its name? After the Tang Family, whose cornerstone gift was part of about \$7 million contributed by alumni and other supporters for the construction of the building.



**Meet Vikash, Quiana, and Candace, three students with key roles (page 3).**

# FEELING ANXIOUS?

A Tang Center psychologist discusses one of the top mental health concerns among Cal students

**A** moderate amount of anxiety in your everyday life is perfectly normal. It would be unusual *not* to feel a bit anxious before a final exam or oral presentation. In fact, moderate anxiety during these situations can be mobilizing, resulting in a better performance.

"Anxiety serves a function" says Susan Bell, PhD, a staff psychologist at UHS. "It is our body's way of gearing up for a challenge, be it physical, emotional or intellectual. Just like pain lets us know we have a physical problem, anxiety symptoms are a signal we are under stress.

"Anxiety is a problem when it interferes with our lives—either because it goes on for too long or because it is so severe that it affects one's schoolwork, relationships or day-to-day functioning."

For example, test anxiety is commonly experienced by students. To feel jittery, have lapses in memory and a nervous stomach may be normal for you. However, if you are too anxious to go to the exam, or if your mind consistently goes blank during the exam and you can't recover, these are signs you should get help.

## Anxiety comes in different forms

"We see a variety of anxiety problems in Counseling & Psychological Services," says Bell. "Some students have anxiety in specific situations, such as fear of flying or performing. Others have a more generalized worry about their future, or their family, or health. Anxiety can also be triggered by a traumatic experience."

Some students experience panic attacks, which are sudden episodes of intense fear that come out of the blue. A panic attack is like a false alarm, explains Bell. It occurs when the body's reaction doesn't fit the true danger of the situation.

Because of common physiological symptoms, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between a physical illness and an anxiety reaction. These symptoms can include sleep problems, racing heart, dizzi-

ness, nausea or stomach pains. Anxiety can show itself by thoughts of losing control or of something catastrophic happening. Other symptoms might include pacing, fidgeting, procrastination or avoidance of places or events.

## What to do?

If you know you are prone to anxiety, says Bell, it's important keep your baseline anxiety level as low as possible. Making healthful lifestyle choices will help, such as getting plenty of sleep and eating well.

It's helpful for students to monitor their own anxiety and develop a "personal tool kit" of self-care techniques. This could include a deep-breathing relaxation exercise, or a recreational activity. The key is to figure out what pieces to place in your kit and when to use them.

For those who have experienced a panic attack—marked by a group of symptoms that can include dizziness, racing heart, perspiring, shortness of breath, fear of dying or "going crazy"—a variety of prevention techniques can be helpful. However, once a panic attack has started, Bell advises to let it run its course. Reassuring thoughts, such as "This feels awful, but I know it will pass," are helpful during an attack.

"While stress and anxiety are a normal part of being at Berkeley," says Bell, "if the anxiety becomes severe and persistent, there's excellent help." Many students have found therapy and medication to be very effective.

## MORE INFO...

To learn more about creating your anxiety management tool kit, feel free to make a clinical health education appointment at 642-2000, or visit the UHS Self-Care Resource Center. For a consultation with a counselor, call Counseling & Psychological Services, 642-9494.

# CALLING THE ADVICE NURSE

Did you know that your registration fees pay for the services of knowledgeable, friendly, 24-hour advice nurses who give out health information and advice at no additional charge?

**Daytime Service:** When UHS is open, a drop-in advice nurse generally is available in all four primary care clinics Monday through Friday, 8:00-11:45 am and 1- 4:45 pm. (When these clinics nurses are unavailable and you have an urgent problem, go to the triage nurse in Urgent Care). The nurse can answer your questions, provide self-care advice, and, if necessary, help you make an appointment or direct you to Urgent Care. You may also call the advice nurse at 643-7197.

**After-hours and Night Service:** If you become ill, injured, or have an urgent concern when UHS is closed (evenings, nights, Sundays and holidays during fall and spring semesters), you can call 643-7197 for help; in case of a life-threatening emergency, call 911. Please be patient: During these hours the advice nurse is not sitting in an office at the Tang Center waiting for calls. Your call is transferred to the Advice Nurse's home where s/he does not have access to your records or the UHS appointment computer system.

## HERE'S HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER:

**Let us know who you are.** While your call is confidential, it's not anonymous. Please be ready to give your name and medical card number; notes about the call will be added to your patient records the next business day. Confirming your status as a registered Cal student or member of a group eligible to use UHS ensures that your registration fees are being used appropriately.

See "Advice Nurse," pg. 4



**643-7197**

# MEET THREE STUDENT HEALTH EDUCATORS

Each year about 150 Cal students participate in teaching other students about health through several programs at the Tang Center. These student "peer educators" receive intensive training, give generously of their time and talents, and make a mighty contribution to the campus. On this page are profiles of peer educators from three of these programs offered through the Health Promotion Unit at UHS.



**VIKASH MISHRA**  
Multicultural AIDS/HIV  
Peer Program (MAPP)

**Major:** Molecular & Cell Biology  
**Year:** Junior  
**Hometown:** Germantown, Maryland

**What is MAPP?** It's a theater group. We do plays for other students. You've heard of "Sex Degrees of Separation?" That's our production this semester. [Fall 2002] MAPP is really about outreach to people of color, educating them about HIV and AIDS and how it affects people differently. But we do it through theater.

**Do you think you reach your audiences?** I would say yes. They relate to it. Usually we're performing for other college students, but sometimes we have high school and even junior high school audiences, and they seem very interested. Some have very little knowledge of HIV and AIDS. I think we present the information in a way that seems real.

**Do you have a background in acting?** Not really! I was the wizard in the Wizard of Oz once. And I like to dance. Last year I was in Dance Movement [Cal dance troupe]. It's one of those things where some people are better actors than others, but the more performances you do, the better you all get at it.

**What do you get from this?** Some of the rewards are unexpected. I didn't know



**QUIANA LA'FLUER**  
Health Worker Program

**Major:** Intended Business  
**Year:** Sophomore  
**Hometown:** Fresno, California

**What do you do as a Health Worker?** I serve the residents of Ehrman Hall, along with another Health Worker. There are over a hundred other Health Workers, serving students where they live. We do health education, some counseling and some first aid. And we refer people to the Tang Center.

**How do you carry out your work?** I find the presentations we do at hall meetings one of the most rewarding things we do. We've led workshops on stress management and healthy eating. We have also shown how to put a friend in the alcohol recovery position. The sessions are fun, and the residents respond to them. It's a great way to get direct feedback.

**What types of situations have you been asked to handle?** I've handled a variety of things, from your basic cuts and scrapes, to burns, aches and pains. I have done some counseling when people were struggling with personal issues. I have also handled situations related to alcohol, and safer sex.

**What are the challenges?** I think the skill I've had to hone is being aware of my surroundings. A lot of times the residents



**CANDACE CHENG**  
Health & Sexuality Peer Program

**Major:** Psychology  
**Year:** Junior  
**Hometown:** Hayward, California

**What is your role in the Health & Sexuality Peer Program?** This is my second year. Last year I was a peer educator. This year I'm a coordinator, working under Amber Stevenson [in Health Promotion], who runs the program. There are four coordinators, each of us overseeing a team of peer educators.

**What do the peer educators do?** They actually work in the Tang clinics holding appointments with students. They teach other students about sexual health issues. They also become walking encyclopedias for their friends and other students.

**What kind of issues do they talk about?** Many students are referred to us before they have a pelvic exam. But contraception is another big subject, and so is safer sex, sexual assault, or just sex. No subject is off-limits.

**Are most of the clients female?** Most, but not all. A lot of couples come. We do quite a bit of outreach, so the education is not limited to the appointments. There are male peer educators, too. One of their roles is doing the counseling in conjunction with the weekly HIV testing.

*Student profiles continue on back page*

## ASK THE EXPERT

(from page 1)

your feet out one foot and flatten your lower back into the wall. Next, put your upper arms and back of your forearms and wrists against the wall—the “stick ‘em up” position. Gradually slide your arms overhead, keeping them back against the wall. You may feel a stretch in your chest and pressure in your mid-back. Hold for five to ten seconds and do three times.

For additional information check out: [www.uhs.berkeley.edu/healthinfo/edhandoutsindex.htm](http://www.uhs.berkeley.edu/healthinfo/edhandoutsindex.htm) and look at the categories under Computer Health and Ergonomics.



## ADVICE NURSE (from page 2)

**Tell us what's going on.** Be prepared to give a concise but detailed summary of your symptoms and concerns (some students find it helpful to jot them down first). The nurse can't see you, so in order to make a proper assessment, the description of your symptoms, including whether you are running a fever, is very important.

**We can help with the next step.** No medical person can fully diagnose someone without seeing them in person; an advice nurse makes recommendations based on a limited amount of information. After listening to your symptoms, the nurse will advise you on what to do next, such as going to Alta Bates Hospital Emergency Room, or coming to the Tang Center for an appointment when it re-opens.

**Sorry, no appointments made.** The after-hours advice nurse is at home and doesn't have access to the UHS appointment system. Thus, even if the nurse advises you to make a medical appointment at the Tang Center for the next day, s/he can't make the appointment for

you during the call. You'll need to call 642-2000 after 8 am the next business day.

**Lab results during business hours only.** Please remember that the after-hours and night service is for urgent issues only. For routine lab and x-ray results, please call the clinic during regular business hours.

**Wait on a prescription.** Depending on your symptoms, the nurse might suggest a self-care program that includes an over-the-counter medication, but an advice nurse cannot usually order or call in a new or refill prescription to a local pharmacy.

**Call on your own.** Try not to call on behalf of a friend or roommate; the advice nurse needs to talk directly with the person with the questions in order to give the best possible advice.

**Busy, and happy to help.** This is a very busy service. The nurses do their best to give complete and accurate medical information. We appreciate your patience and support.

## VIKASH MISHRA

(from page 3)

how much I'd learn. You might think you know a lot about a subject, but what is known about [HIV/AIDS] changes all the time. I also wondered how I'd fit in one more thing, but MAPP is a good outlet. It's something fun with a purpose.

**What are your plans for the future?** If all goes well, I hope to be a pediatrician.

*Vikash's career goals include practicing medicine in rural India. He spent last summer shadowing a pediatrician in India, near the small village where most of his relatives live.*

*The peer education programs at UHS will be recruiting for the 2003/2004 academic year starting in February. Please go to the UHS web site (See students/health promotion/peer education) for more information about the individual programs and application process.*

## QUIANA LA'FLIER

won't come to you and tell you there's a problem. So as a Health Worker you have to be constantly aware of what's going on. Sometimes things jump out at you, but other times it's subtle. When we sense a concern, we try to address it right away.

**What have you learned?** Where should I begin? I have learned to be completely accepting of peoples' choices and their right to make their own decisions. I have learned a lot about how people relate to one another. I have learned what it feels like to help people in a completely different capacity. I'm learning what I can and can't handle. And I'm learning a lot about time management!

**What do people not know about you?** Well, I play the clarinet and in high school I was very active in theater.

**Have you considered becoming a member of MAPP?** I am a member of MAPP!

*In fact, Quiana was in MAPP last year, and this year serves as a MAPP coordinator.*

## CANDACE CHENG

**How do the peer educators become so knowledgeable?** You wouldn't believe the training. I walked into this with very little knowledge. I had virtually no sex-ed in high school. So I couldn't imagine how I would learn everything. But at the beginning you go through a whole week of training, and then you attend a two-hour seminar every week throughout the year. Members of the class do special study projects and present them, so you cover a wide breadth of topics. As coordinators, we participate in planning the curriculum.

**What character traits are needed for this job?** Well, you need to have an open mind, of course, and be non-judgmental, but these are also traits you develop in the training. Enthusiasm, dedication, and a willingness to learn are good, too!

*A career as an OB-Gyn is on Candace's radar screen, but public health is creeping into the picture.*