

Please welcome Sarah Verbiest, DrPH, MSW, MPH, Executive Director, UNC Center for Maternal and Infant Health to the position as consultant and advisor to the CDC for the national Preconception Health and Health Care (PCHHC) Initiative. Kay Johnson recently ended her six year tenure in this role and as co-chair of the Select Panel. Kay will continue as volunteer co-chair for the Policy Finance Work Group of the Initiative.

Dr. Verbiest brings new, young, dynamic leadership to the movement to improve women's health and pregnancy outcomes through preconception health and health care. As she describes it, she was "mentored by the mother of preconception health, Merry-K Moos." She has worked on the issue of preconception health through programmatic, policy, and leadership activities for more than 10 years, including a dissertation on the postpartum visit as an overlooked opportunity for prevention. She is a former State Program Director for the North Carolina Chapter of the March of Dimes.

Her leadership in North Carolina is notable. Following the release of the CDC Recommendations in 2006, Dr. Verbiest wrote, published and distributed a compendium of preconception related efforts in North Carolina (historic and current) along with a call to action to implement the new recommendations (March 2007). In 2009, she worked with the NC Institute of Medicine to publish a special issue of their journal focusing on Preconception Care and was involved in the development of her state's preconception health plan. She was principle investigator of a three-year exploratory study to understand the interconception needs of mothers of medically fragile infants and advanced legislation in North Carolina that required Medicaid to explore the provision of an interconception care waiver. She also coordinated a project with a large local health department to focus on the postpartum visit and health needs of new mothers. Through partnerships which she helped to lead and coordinate, North Carolina has been able to move forward on several key initiatives well ahead of many other states – including work on folic acid, preconception, 17P, postpartum care and tobacco cessation.

Taking work to the next level, Dr. Verbiest broadened her organizing efforts from the state to a regional level through the development of the Every Woman Southeast (EWSE) Initiative. Through EWSE, eight states in the Southeast have built a strong partnership. This year, EWSE was awarded a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to advance and sustain its work.

Dr. Verbiest also has been active at the national level. She has participated over the past two years in the national PCHHC Initiative Steering Committee monthly meetings, as well as the Consumer Work Group. She serves as Co-Chair of AMCHP's Best Practices Committee and will be a member of the North Carolina leadership team for the HRSA / ASTHO Infant Mortality Prevention Initiative/COIN.

Her outstanding leadership, coalition-building, writing, speaking, and organizational skills will be appreciated in this new role with the PCHHC Initiative. Watch for her style to be reflected in the next e-newsletter.