

## REPORT FROM THE FIELD

# 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Georgia Public Health Association Meeting & Conference Report

Selina A. Smith, PhD, MDiv,<sup>1</sup> Regina Abbott, MPA,<sup>2</sup> and Christy Sims, APRN, ASN, WHNP-BC<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Director, Institute of Public and Preventive Health, Professor and Curtis G. Hames, MD, Distinguished Chair, Department of Family Medicine Medical College of Georgia, and Vice President, Georgia Public Health Association; <sup>2</sup>President, Alpha<sup>2</sup> Omega Center for Organizational Excellence, Executive Services Provider and Past President, Georgia Public Health Association; and <sup>3</sup>Historian and Exhibits Chair, Georgia Public Health Association

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 86<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Georgia Public Health Association (GPHA) and joint conference with the Southern Health Association was held in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 13-14, 2015, with pre-conference (April 12<sup>th</sup>) and post-conference (April 14<sup>th</sup>) Executive Board meetings. As Georgia's leading forum for public health researchers, practitioners, and students, the annual meeting of the GPHA brings together participants from across the state to explore recent developments in the field and to exchange techniques, tools, and experiences. Historically, the GPHA conference has been held in Savannah (n=24); Jekyll Island (n=20); Atlanta (n=16); Augusta (n=4); and Gainesville (n=1). There was no annual meeting during the early years (1929-1936); during World War II (1941-1943 and 1945); and for four years during the 1980s. Between 2006 and 2010, GPHA held one-day annual meetings and business sessions with educational workshops.

Several new initiatives were highlighted as part of this year's conference. These included a "move and groove" physical activity lounge, registration scholarships for students with a dedicated meet-and-greet reception, an expanded exhibit hall, presentation and approval of three resolutions (related to healthy foods at official activities and events; weapons at official activities and events; and memorials), and approval of the 2015 legislative policy positions and amended association bylaws.

The theme for the conference was *Advocacy in Action for Public Health*. Specifically, the program addressed ensuring access to care; protecting funding for core programs, services, and infrastructure; eliminating health disparities; and addressing key public health issues important to the state of Georgia. One hundred and nine (109) abstracts were submitted for peer review; 36 were accepted for poster and 40 for workshop presentations. Four plenary sessions with keynote speakers covered the intersection between advocacy and policy, Georgia's response to the Ebola crisis, palliative care, and essentials of advocacy in action for public health. Concurrent workshops focused on Board of Health training, public health accreditation, capacity building, collaboration, patient-centered outcomes, synthetic cannabinoid use, the HIV care continuum, use of data for informed decision making, environmental threats, organizational development, epidemiology, policy, and regulation.

Thirty-two (32) awards were presented, including Lawmaker of the Year Award to Governor Nathan and First Lady Sandra Deal for their active and engaged role in promoting public health in Georgia; and the Sellers-McCroan Award to Commissioner Brenda Fitzgerald, Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) State Health Officer, for her leadership of the Georgia Ebola Response Team and leadership of the newly formed department. The conference attracted 569 registrants primarily through pre-registration (n=561) with limited onsite registration (n=8). For this year's conference, there was a significant increase in attendance (36%) and exhibitors (33%) relative to 2014. Of registrants reporting GPHA section participation, representation included: academic (5%); administration (10%); boards of health (13%); career development (15%); emergency preparedness (2%); epidemiology (5%); health education and promotion (2%); information technology (2%); maternal and child health (3%); medical/dental (3%); nursing (10%); nutrition (<1%); and other/no record (15%). There was 100% participation in the conference from the state's 18 public health districts. The conference evaluation completed by a representative sample of registrants indicated areas of potential improvement as: starting sessions on time, using electronic and social media for the conference agenda/syllabus, and decreasing workshop sessions to 45 minutes. Most rated the conference as "good" or "excellent."

### Overview

#### Purpose

The Georgia Public Health Association (GPHA), established in 1928, is the largest body of public health professionals in the southeastern U.S. As one of 54 state and regional affiliates of the American Public Health Association (APHA), GPHA has the same goals as the APHA: to promote, protect, and advocate for the public's

health. As Georgia's leading forum for public health researchers, practitioners, and students, GPHA's annual meeting and conference explores recent developments in the field and presents an opportunity for participants to exchange techniques, tools, and experiences.

History

Historically, the GPHA conference has been held in Savannah (n=24); Jekyll Island (n=20); Atlanta (n=16); Augusta (n=4), and Gainesville (n=1). There was no annual meeting during the early years (1929-1936); during World War II (1941-1943 and 1945); and for four years during the 1980s, with one-day annual meetings and business sessions with educational workshops between 2006 and 2010.

Theme

The 2015 GPHA theme was selected by President Deborah Riner, presented to the Conference and Executive Committees, and approved by the Executive Board. According to APHA, “Advocacy in Action” includes ensuring access to care, protecting funding for core public health programs and services, and eliminating health disparities. Other critical public health issues, such as public health and emergency preparedness, food safety, hunger and nutrition, climate change and other environmental health issues, public health infrastructure, disease control, international health and tobacco control, benefit from advocacy to inform and engage the public and policy makers to ensure science-based decisions.

Content

The conference included plenary sessions, luncheons, workshops, posters and exhibits:

1. *Plenary Sessions*

Cynthia Hallett, Executive Director, Americans for Nonsmokers’ Rights: “The Role of Advocacy in Public Health Policy”

Jennifer Currin-McCollough, Manager Oncology Support Services, and Karen Terry, Director of Operations, Curtis and Elizabeth Anderson Cancer Institute: “Palliative Care”

Scott Maxwell, Mathews & Maxwell; Judith A. Monroe, Deputy Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Brenda Fitzgerald, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Public Health and Robert M. Williams, Jr. Chairman and Publisher, SouthFire Newspapers Group: “The Essentials of Advocacy in Action and Your Role in the Process”

Sellers-McCroan Lecture keynote speaker and awardee Brenda Fitzgerald’s topic was “Working Through Fear”

2. *Luncheons, Workshops and Posters*

The Sellers-McCroan Award Lecture and Luncheon (Day 1) and GPHA Awards Luncheon (Day 2) were also included. Concurrent workshops focused on training for local boards of health members, public health accreditation, capacity building, collaboration, patient-centered outcomes, synthetic cannabinoid use, the HIV care continuum, using data for better decisions, environmental threats,

organizational development, epidemiology, policy, and regulation. Throughout the conference period, posters and exhibits were presented in dedicated space with participant access.

3. *Exhibits*

As the premier meeting place for organizations committed to improving the health of all Georgians, the GPHA annual meeting and conference provides networking opportunities and access to conference registrants.

Table 1. Conference Exhibitors
Alzheimer’s Association, Georgia Chapter
American Cancer Society Cancer Coalition Network
American Public Health Association
Amerigroup
Atlanta Postal Credit Union
CDP, Inc.
Eggland’s Best Specialty Eggs
Emory Public Health Training Center
Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health
Fort Valley State University
Georgia Alliance for Health Literacy
Georgia Chapter American Academy of Pediatrics
Georgia Department of Public Health Immunization Program
Georgia Department of Public Health Injury Prevention Program
Georgia Department of Public Health Online Analytical Statistical Information System
Georgia Department of Public Health Women, Infants, Children Program
Georgia Regents University
Georgia Regents University
Institute of Public and Preventive Health
Georgia Southern University
Jiann Ping Hsu College of Public Health
Georgia State University
Georgia Public Health Association Board of Health Section
Georgia Public Health Association History
Georgia Public Health Association Memorials
Georgia Public Health Association Vintage Store and Terminal
Healthcare Georgia Foundation
Hemophilia of Georgia
Hologic
JSI Research & Training Institute
Merck
Mitchell & McCormick
Mothers and Others for Clean Air
National Network of Libraries of Medicine
Patagonia Health
Peach State Health Plan
Sanofi Pasteur
Silent Auction
Southern Health Association
Southern Linc Wireless
The Instrument House
University of Georgia College of Public Health
University of Georgia Radon Education Program
Walden University

### Conference Registration

As units of the GPHA, sections provide opportunities for member involvement, social networking, professional development, and mentoring. GPHA has 16 sections representing public health disciplines or programs. Figure 1 outlines section representation for the 2015 conference.

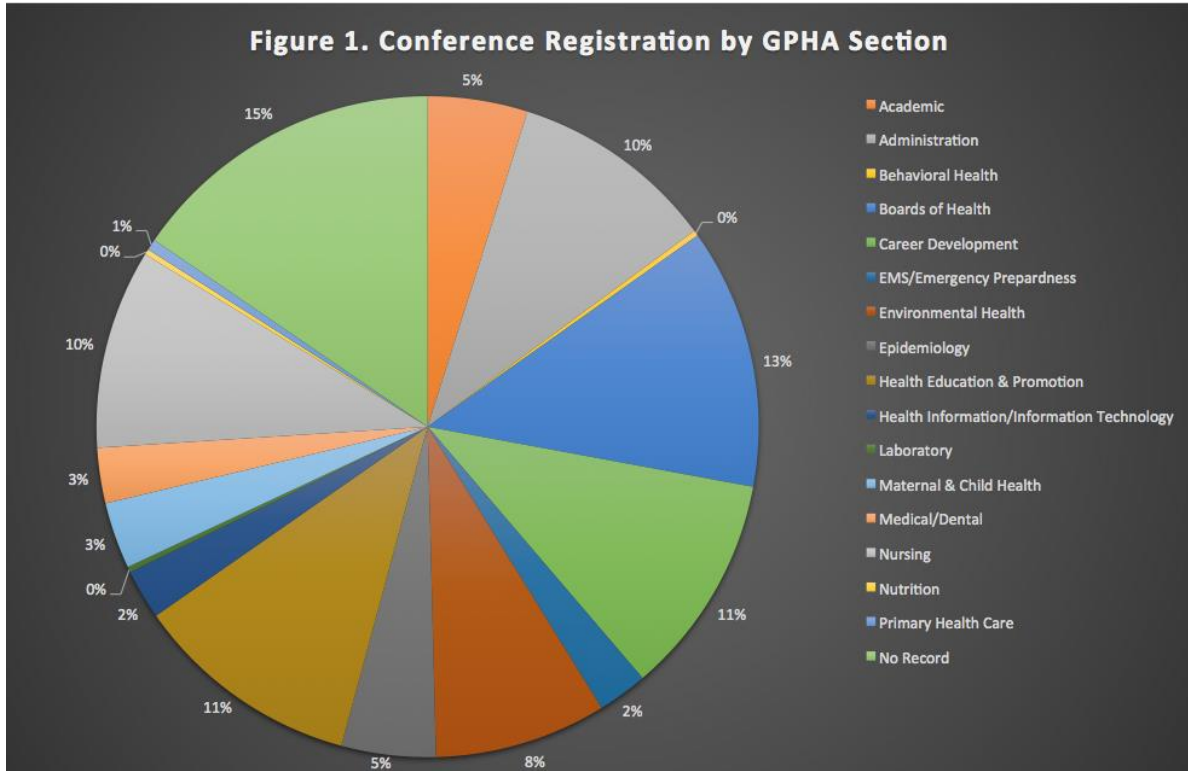


Table 2 provides a breakdown of the conference registration.

<b>Table 2. Registration Breakdown</b>	
<i>Registration Type</i>	<i>Total (n)</i>
Pre-registration	561
Onsite registration	8
Speaker	87
Full Conference/Member	190
Full Conference/Non-member	37
One-day Conference/Member	12
One-day Conference/Non-member	7
Full Conference/Career Development (Student)	14
Full Conference/Retiree	10
One-day Conference/Retiree	3
One-day Conference/Career Development	10
Full Conference/Accreditation	10
Full Conference/Career Development Scholarship	18
Full Conference/Board of Health	35
Sellers-McCroan Luncheon	14
GPHA Awards Luncheon	43
Exhibitor/Sponsor	79
<b>Total Registrations</b>	<b>569</b>

### Sponsorship

Each year, the GPHA Conference Committee establishes a sponsorship goal to offset costs associated with the annual meeting. Conference sponsors (e.g., academic institutions, corporations, and community-based organizations) gain access to a broad community of professionals representing various public health disciplines: academic, research, practice, policy, and administration. For the 2015 conference, a goal of \$60,000 was set, and a prospectus outlining sponsorship levels was distributed to past and potential sponsors between June-October, 2014, with follow-up by GPHA President, Vice President, or Executive Services Provider. Table 3 presents sponsorship for this year's conference. There were increases in the number of sponsors (10%) and sponsorship revenue (6.45%) from the previous year.

<i>Sponsorship Level</i>	<i>Organization</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Presenting Sponsor	Georgia Regents University, Institute of Public & Preventive Health	\$25,000
Preferred Sponsor	Healthcare Georgia Foundation	12,000
Platinum Sponsor	American Public Health Association	5,000
	Emory University, Rollins School of Public Health	5,000
	Georgia Public Health Association, Board of Health Section	6,000
	Mitchell and McCormick	5,000
Bronze Sponsor	Amerigroup	1,500
	CDP, Inc.	1,500
	Patagonia Health	1,500
	Southern Health Association	1,500
Loyal Sponsor	Coastal Hypnosis	500

During the past five years, the conference has had a general increase in registration, poster and workshop presentations, exhibitors, and sponsors (Table 4). From 2014 to 2015, the number of registrants increased by 36%, exhibits by 33%, and sponsors by 10%.

	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2015</i>
<i>Registrants</i>	337	483	313	417	569
<i>Posters</i>	30	15	18	24	36
<i>Workshops</i>	31	32	26	32	40
<i>Exhibitors</i>	32	36	17	14	42
<i>Sponsors</i>	3	7	7	10	11

### Abstract Submission and Acceptance Process

On September 27, 2014, a call for abstracts was made with a deadline for applications submitted to the GPHA conference committee of October 31, 2014, 5:00pm. Abstract authors self-selected a format: poster, 30-minute workshop, or 60-minute workshop. The conference committee invited public health practitioners, researchers, educators, and students with expertise/experience in public health to serve as abstract reviewers. A total of 36 abstract reviewers representing academic institutions (Armstrong University, Emory University, and Georgia Regents University); local health districts; Georgia Department of Public Health; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; and Southern Health Association served as reviewers. Reviewers used a numerical rating to judge abstracts as: a) 9-10 (definitely accept); b) 6-8 (accept); c) 4-5 (borderline accept); d) 1-3 (not acceptable). Reviewers submitted reviews to the conference committee on November 26, 2014, and authors were informed of decisions during December 19-22, 2015. A total of 109 abstracts were submitted, with 76 accepted based on a rating of  $\geq 7.75$ .

### James W. Alley Memorial Fund /Silent Auction History and Process

The James W. Alley Memorial Fund was established to honor James W. Alley, MD, MPH, who served as Division Director of Public Health of Georgia for 17 years. In the 1970's during his tenure as State Health Director, Dr. Alley focused the attention of public health on chronic diseases that could be amenable to public health interventions and education. Later, he initiated intervention research in infant mortality, examining the impact of social factors in morbidity and mortality. As a former GPHA president, Dr. Alley recognized the value of a public health professional organization that encouraged networking and continuing education. As a medical missionary to Bolivia, Dr. Alley helped establish a local Board of Health in the city of Montero to remediate some of the health issues of the indigent and medically needy. He continued to visit and work in this eastern area of Bolivia for over a decade and left the region with the most respected medical service in that country. The fund was first proposed to the GPHA members at the annual meeting in 2001. The original intent of the memorial was to raise enough funds through silent auctions at the annual meetings to sponsor a three-week "summer break" for two people, an MPH student and a public health professional, to visit Bolivia and work in the health services that Dr. Alley helped establish. The first award was aborted due to unstable political conditions in Bolivia. In December 2013, the Past President's Council was tasked with overseeing the annual silent auction. In 2014, the Executive Board approved use of resources from the James W. Alley Memorial Fund to support a limited number of registration scholarships for the upcoming Annual Meeting. The Career Development Section developed criteria for distribution of scholarships. In 2015, 18 conference registration scholarships were awarded to students representing 8 of 9 public health schools/programs in Georgia.

### Annual Awards

A call for award nominations was released to the membership on October 23, 2014, and extended to January 16, 2015. The Awards Committee reviewed nominations and selected recipients for two legacy awards: the Al Dohaney Award for Community Service and the Jules S. Terry Memorial Award. GPHA sections reviewed remaining nominations and selected recipients based on discipline. The annual association Awards Luncheon, which recognizes outstanding service of individuals in the field of public health, included presentation of 17 section awards.

### Sellers-McCroan Award/Luncheon History and Process

During the 56<sup>th</sup> conference in 1985, a resolution was presented and approved for establishment of an annual lecture honoring the memory of Thomas Fort Sellers, Sr., MD, and John Edgar McCroan, Jr., PhD. The call for nominations was issued in October 23, 2014. The award recognizes outstanding achievement and service in

epidemiology and/or laboratory professionals in Georgia and may be given to an individual or team whose work has had substantial impact at the state, district, or county levels, in academia or in hospitals. Applications were received by the GPHA President-Elect and the Sellers-McCroan Award committee. The 2015 Sellers-McCroan Award was made to Dr. Brenda Fitzgerald, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Public Health State Health Officer, for her leadership of the Department and most recently, the Georgia Ebola Response Team.

### Honorary Members

GPHA recognizes outstanding service to public health through individual honorary membership. Nominations for honorary members, with justification, are submitted to the Membership Committee at least three months prior to the annual meeting. Based on recommendation of the Membership Committee and endorsement by the Executive Board, up to two nominees may be presented for election during the annual meeting. Olivia Mallichek and Governor Nathan Deal were conferred honorary membership during the 86<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting. Ms. Mallichek, a community disease specialist with the West Central Health District in Columbus, was honored for her commitment to public health on April 14 during the GPHA Awards Luncheon. As a member and officer of the Epidemiology Section since 1990, she has missed only one annual meeting and conference since joining the Association. Governor Deal was not present to receive his award personally, but the Department of Public Health staff accepted it on his behalf.

### Legislator of the Year Award

The Legislator of the Year Award is recommended and approved by the Executive Board and awarded for special support of health care and public health issues during the most recent General Assembly. Governor Nathan and First Lady Sandra Deal were selected to receive the “Lawmaker of the Year” Award for their active and engaged role in promoting public health in Georgia. In 2011, Governor Deal, with the support of the state House and Senate, created the Department of Public Health (DPH) as its own agency, with independent resources and direct line of report to the Governor. More recently, the Governor included funds in his budget recommendation to the General Assembly for hold-harmless funding to accommodate the phase-in of a new distribution formula for county health departments. First Lady Sandra Deal has been a constant and avid supporter of public health. She made numerous personal appearances on behalf of the DPH to curb obesity and to elevate the reading of Georgia’s youngsters to grade level. She personally presented awards to DPH employees and assisted with the recognition of hospitals, schools, and other partners who participate in DPH programs and organized a Children’s Cabinet, which pursues monthly public relations initiatives that often include a focus on public health (April – Prevention & Awareness, July – Immunization Awareness, and September – Health Choices).

GPHA President Deborah Riner presents Governor Nathan Deal with the Lawmaker of the Year Award to recognize him and First Lady Sandra Deal.



Pictured, left to right: Legislative Educator Scott Maxwell, Secretary Dianne McWethy, Deborah Riner, Governor Nathan Deal, Parliamentarian Don Ramsey, and President-Elect Johanna Hinman.

### Continuing Education

The Individual Educational Activity Applicant Eligibility Verification application for continuing education accreditation was submitted by GPHA to APHA on January 18, 2015, for continuing medical education (CME), continuing nursing education (CNE), and certified health education specialist (CHES). APHA created accounts for each registrant and emailed a link to the online evaluation survey, which was completed by registrants prior to receipt of a continuing education certificate. The on-line survey closed on May 29. Evaluation surveys were forwarded to GPHA for review and use for future conference planning.

### Evaluation

In a representative sample of conference registrants, most indicated that they attended the conference to learn more about public health in Georgia and to avail themselves of networking opportunities with other professionals in the field. The area rated highest was learning about the forum that GPHA provided for networking. Areas of potential improvement included: starting sessions on time, using electronic and social media for the conference agenda/syllabus, and decreasing workshop sessions to 45 minutes. Overall, most registrants rated the 86<sup>th</sup> GPHA meeting and conference as “good” or “excellent.”

### Acknowledgements

This work was funded by the National Cancer Institute (1R01CA166785-01).