**Widening inequality in Boston and beyond**

“SOME OF THESE NUMBERS may surprise you, because we tend to think of ourselves as very successful as a region and as a nation,” said Charlotte Kahn, co-founder and director of the Boston Indicators Project. Kahn revealed some unsettling local statistics — including that Suffolk County is among the top 50 most unequal counties in the nation — in her presentation, “Widening Income Inequality and its Effects on Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Boston and Beyond,” April 27 in the Ether Dome.

The lecture was held in honor of the YWCA’s National Stand Against Racism Day, created in 2007 to raise awareness that racism still exists. “We’re proud to be a participating site in 2012,” said Deborah Washington, RN, director of MGH Diversity for Patient Care Services, who welcomed attendees alongside Larry Seamans, senior vice president and chief operating officer of YWCA Boston. “MGH has a longstanding commitment to diversity and what that means as an employer, a health care provider and member of the community.”

Funded and coordinated by the Boston Foundation, the Boston Indicators Project collects, analyzes and publicizes data in 10 subjects — ranging from economics to health — for Boston, its neighborhoods and the surrounding region. The project published its first report more than 10 years ago; its most recent one was released March 14.

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**RAISING AWARENESS:** From left, Seamans, Washington and Kahn

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**$10 million gift benefits youth programs**

**WHEN ZAZIL MERDONES** of West Roxbury heads to Fitchburg State University to study nursing this fall, she will have a $5,000 annual scholarship from the MGH and a college coach to help her succeed academically and graduate. Merdones is an MGH Bicentennial Scholar, one of 26 students in the graduating class of 2012 from Boston, Chelsea and Revere who are receiving mentorship and academic and financial support from the MGH as they pursue their college dreams. With a new $10 million gift from Partners HealthCare and its founding hospitals, the MGH and BWH, hundreds of additional students involved in both institutions’ youth achievement programs will benefit in the years ahead.

The gift was announced May 3 at Boston City Hall by Gary L. Gottlieb, MD, MBA, president and CEO of Partners HealthCare, and is in part inspired by the MGH Bicentennial Scholars program, which was created by the MGH in 2011 as a gift to the community in honor of its bicentennial. Merdones and MGH President Peter L. Slavin, MD, were among those who addressed guests gathered for the May 3 announcement, including Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino and Boston Public Schools Superintendent Carol Johnson, PhD.

“Since we created this program, we have been asking ourselves how we could offer it to additional classes of students,” said Slavin. “I am so pleased to say today that the funds from the Partners scholarship program will allow us to establish additional cohorts totaling 145 students, who, like Zazil, will receive this support, extending our program over the next 10 years. We are extremely grateful for this opportunity.”

Merdones spoke about her journey from being an indifferent middle school student to a motivated high school senior determined to attend college. As MGH Bicentennial Scholars, Merdones and the other students have received comprehensive support for the past two years including SAT prep, college tours, mentoring, financial aid counseling and employment opportunities. All 26 Bicentennial Scholars were accepted to college.
In her presentation, which highlighted trends identified by the reports, Kahn compared a period from 1947 to 1979, when national prosperity was shared and incomes were more equal, with the last three decades, when despite sharply increasing worker productivity, average wages stalled while the incomes of those at the top continued to grow. During this time, individual debt ballooned in response to increased college, housing and health care costs.

Today, U.S. incomes are extremely unequal. In Boston, the top 5 percent of earners account for 25 percent of aggregate annual income, while the bottom 20 percent account for 2.2 percent. “These trends have cut into household budgets, making it very difficult for the average person to get ahead,” said Kahn. “The United States is almost off the charts among all wealthy, developed nations in terms of income inequality and a lack of intergenerational mobility.”

According to Kahn, this inequality is often reflected racially. In Boston, the per capita income of white residents is two to three times higher than that of residents of color, largely because income — and unemployment — are closely tied to education. Massachusetts ranks No. 1 on certain national standardized tests for eighth graders, but within that group, black and Latino students score at the lowest end of the scale. Similarly, the percent of Boston’s black and Latino adults with a bachelor of arts degree has increased marginally over the past three decades compared with dramatic increases among white and Asian residents.

Kahn pointed to a series of maps to show the correlation between race, inequality and geography in Greater Boston, emphasizing the neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, where education attainment is lowest and levels of poverty are highest. These same neighborhoods also are disproportionately affected by rising rates of preventable hypertension and diabetes hospitalization as well as the highest rates of violent crime.

“If we allow these trends to continue, we are going to plow under as a nation,” she said.

Moving ahead, Kahn said, eliminating disparities in education is key. She challenged attendees to try to reduce health care costs, which are crowding out investments in education, and encouraged them to put more emphasis on community-wide preventive strategies.

“Healthy people mean a healthy economy,” she concluded.

The event was sponsored by the MGH Center for Community Health Improvement, the Department of Emergency Medicine, the Disparities Solutions Center, the Multicultural Affairs Office and Patient Care Services Diversity. To read Boston Indicators Project reports, visit www.bostonindicators.org.
TO ADVANCE the understanding and treatment of autism, Nancy Lurie Marks and the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation have established the Nancy Lurie Marks Professorship in the Field of Autism at Harvard Medical School (HMS). The chair's first incumbent is Christopher McDougle, MD, who joined the MGH in October as the inaugural director of the Lurie Center for Autism. The center was established in 2009 through the generosity of Marks and her family foundation, building upon the success of a MassGeneral Hospital for Children program previously known as LADDERS.

During an April 23 celebration at HMS, MGH President Peter L. Slavin, MD, congratulated McDougle and commended his dedication to furthering the research mission of the Lurie Center and building the center's first teaching and physician mentoring program.


An international expert in autism care and research – with a unique focus on adult patients with the disorder – McDougle came to the MGH after 11 years as chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at the Indiana University School of Medicine. “It is a tremendous honor to be named the first Nancy Lurie Marks Professor in the Field of Autism at Harvard Medical School,” he said. “With Nancy’s inspiration and the resources available to us at Mass General and Mass General Hospital for Children, we are working diligently with colleagues throughout the city of Boston to improve the quality of life for individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their family members.”

Also speaking at the event were Jeffrey Flier, MD, dean of HMS; Clarence Schutt, PhD, director and chief scientific officer of the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation; and Jerrold Rosenbaum, MD, chief of the MGH Department of Psychiatry.

Annual fair celebrates women’s health

WOMEN OF ALL AGES came together May 2 during “Celebrating Women, Living a Vibrant, Healthy Life,” an educational event to highlight women’s health issues and honor female role models in the community. The free public event, held at Everett High School, is hosted annually by the MGH Center for Community Health Improvement and the MGH health centers.

The evening featured a health fair — with screenings, demonstrations and activities about topics ranging from smoking cessation to Reiki. The 500 participants also enjoyed a light dinner, ballroom dancing lessons and presentations by Wayne Wescott, PhD, director of the Exercise Science Program at Quincy College, and Rae Baraka, ACE-CPT, CFM, director of the Fitness and Employee Wellness Program at the MGH Revere HealthCare Center, who emphasized the importance of being active as part of this year’s event theme, “Women: Moving Through the Ages.”

In addition, MGH physician Mallika Marshall, MD, of the Chelsea HealthCare Center, presented six women with the annual MGH Celebrating Women Award. Selected by their local health centers, the recipients were introduced by high school students and graduates who had interviewed them prior to the event. The recipients are: Lee Forgione, a 92-year-old advocate for senior citizens in Chelsea; Felicia Coward, an education advisor and Americans with Disabilities Act coordinator for the Charlestown Adult Literacy Program; Joanne Stroud-Lebeau, who works in the breast health outreach and education program and the women’s housing services program at the YWCA in Everett; Mary Romano, a longtime North End resident known for using her crocheting and baking talents for the good of others; Cindy Evans, PhD, principal of the Rumney Marsh Academy in Revere, who is highly active in her community; and Ruth Bernstein, a beloved former teacher, guidance counselor and coach from Winthrop High School.

Marshall was surprised with a special award to honor her commitment to women’s health and the community. She has been closely involved with “Celebrating Women, Living a Vibrant, Healthy Life” since it began in 2001.
feature the MGH Diabetes Center, its patients, research volunteers and staff – including center director David Nathan, MD; Robert Gerszten, director of the Clinical and Translational Research Program and Greg Lewis, MD, associate director of the Cardiopulmonary Exercise Lab, both of the MGH Heart Center; and David Altshuler, MD, PhD, of the Molecular Biology Department.

Clinical Research Program
The MGH Clinical Research Program is offering the following seminars in the Simches Center, Room 3.110: “The Principles and Practice of Clinical Research Data Management” May 17 from 2 to 3 pm; and “IRB Issues for the Bench and Desk Scientist” May 21 from 3 to 4:30 pm. Register at http://hub.partners.org/catalog.

MGH College Fair
Representatives from more than 20 area schools will participate in the eighth annual MGH College Fair May 17 from noon to 3 pm, in the Bulfinch Tent. The event is part of the Training and Workforce Development Office’s “Steps to Success” series.

National Neuropathy Week
The Neuromuscular Diagnostic Center will host an information table in the Main Corridor about electromyography on May 17 and neuromuscular infusion on May 18 from 8:30 am to 2 pm. For more information, call 617-724-7013 or email mthurston@partners.org.

Benson-Henry training course
The Benson-Henry Institute for Mind Body Medicine at the MGH is offering “The Revolutionary Practice of Mind Body Medicine,” a training course for health care providers June 4-8 at the Joseph B. Martin Conference Center at HMS. The course will help participants understand the science behind the relaxation response; integrate mind body interventions into practice; learn about the cognitive strategies that work to ease profound suffering; explore the relationship between stress and mood; and review the neuroendocrine-immune physiology of positive emotions. For more information, call 617-384-8600.

WHEN JONATHAN ZUKER’S FATHER was diagnosed with late stage lung cancer in 2003, he found himself on an uncertain and unfamiliar path. It is one that many families encounter as they navigate the new challenges and often harsh realities that come when a loved one has cancer.

Zuker, now executive director of the nonprofit Conquer Cancer Coalition of Massachusetts, spoke during the April 28 event, “Cancer in the Family: Living with Uncertainty,” hosted by the MGH Cancer Center and its peer support program, The Network for Patients and Families. The day-long conference featured speakers and panel discussions and provided patients and family members with information on current cancer topics and coping mechanisms.

The coalition was created in the wake of the death of Zuker’s father as a way to make a difference in the cancer community by increasing awareness and raising funding for cancer services. During his opening remarks, Zuker said this community has allowed him to see that even the most difficult times can bring out the best of humanity.

“There’s a lot of uncertainty in our cancer journey, there was always reliability and strength to be found here at Mass General,” Zuker said. “Every step of the way we knew how lucky we were to be able to come here for treatment, and how grateful we are to be able to give back in our own way. When you are here, you are in the best hospital in the world. When you are not sure of anything else, you can be certain of that.”