Focus On: Verna S. Cole, PhD, MDiv

Verna S. Cole, PhD, MDiv, loves using her extensive background in educational leadership to help the Young Driver Research Initiative (YDRI) develop effective tools and interventions to reduce teen driver crash risk.

The daughter of two teachers, Dr. Cole always knew her path would lead to educating others. She has worked at all levels of Philadelphia’s K-12 school system, as an administrator, emergency preparedness expert, trainer, and program planner and also served as the Program Director of the city’s Community-Based Detention, Youth Advocacy Program. Now she’s sharing her considerable skills with the multidisciplinary YDRI team.

“I enjoy working with the researchers. They see the world differently than educators,” she says. “It’s fascinating to see how they interact with the rest of the team to develop interventions based on their research to keep teens safe.”

Dr. Cole is teaming up with driver’s education instructors and school-based agencies across the nation to build a strong network for discussion, dissemination of research that is backed by science, and ongoing reflection. Through this synergy, Dr. Cole and the entire YDRI team are developing effective instructional and educational tools and outreach materials backed my science to reach as many teens and their families as possible. Part of that role is to work with researchers in studying how instruction should be designed and carried out during the learning-to-drive process.

“I will provide my insight into how instruction is a significant part of the interaction between a teen and parent or teen and driving instructor and how best to create it,” she says. “Driver’s Ed instructors are among the most dedicated folks I’ve ever met in any profession. It’s an honor to interact with them.”

Dr. Cole earned her PhD in Education-Organizational Leadership, Curriculum, and Instruction from The University of Pennsylvania and her Master of Divinity, Counseling and Administration from Yale University Divinity School. She also has completed coursework in emergency preparedness from Disaster Recovery Institute International.

“Through the YDRI team’s efforts, we are working to bring hope back to the learning-to-drive process,” says Dr. Cole. “Our primary mantra, that crashes are preventable, offers a strong foundation on which to design measurable interventions that will significantly impact the number of teen deaths from crashes. I’m proud to be a part of this initiative.”

Harris Named INSIGHT Fellow

Patricia Harris, assistant to Drs. Flaura Winston and...
Injury Center Researcher Chosen for NICHD Training Program

Jessica S. Hafetz, PhD, a behavioral scientist with the Young Driver Research Initiative (YDRI) at the Center, recently attended a special training program for junior investigators at the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, MD. The week-long NICHD Summer Research Institute in Applied Child and Adolescent Development focused on helping these rising stars develop advanced research skills, obtain federal funding, and improve dissemination of findings to help achieve their research goals. Dr. Hafetz was invited to participate by the NICHD for her work in designing and evaluating programs and interventions to be delivered directly to families with teens for CHOP and State Farm’s Young Driver Research Initiative.

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Family of Websites

- The Center for Injury Research and Prevention (www.chop.edu/injury)
- Keeping Kids Safe in Crashes-English language – English language (www.chop.edu/carseat)
- Cómo Mantener a los Niños Fuera de Peligro Durante los Choques – Spanish language (www.chop.edu/asientos_infantiles)
- Keeping Young Drivers Safe (www.chop.edu/youngdrivers)
- National Teen Driver Safety Week (www.ntdsw2009.org)
- Philadelphia Collaborative Violence Prevention Center (PCVPC) (www.chop.edu/pvpc)
- After The Injury: Helping Parents Help Their Kids Recover (www.AfterTheInjury.org)