



EVELYN JACOBS ORTNER Center on Family Violence



Spring/Summer 2016

Lois Cronholm, Editor

Director's Message



Susan B. Sorenson, Ph.D.
Director

The past few months have been a busy time of research, a federal grant proposal, and the Ortner Center's ever-expanding role of teaching, campus activities, and promoting the goals of the Center. Here are a few highlights of those months, and a bit about what's ahead.

Dr. Denis Mukwege, known as the "Mender of Women," met in March at Penn with a group of Ortner faculty and students. A Nobel Peace Prize nominee, recipient of multiple awards including the Sakharov Prize for the Freedom of Thought, in 1998, he initiated construction of the Panzi Hospital in Bukavu. Founded and operating amid the violence of a war in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, the hospital treats survivors of sexual violence and women with severe gynecological problems. The scope and excellence of his work are known worldwide, and he has borne severe personal costs because of it. After a 2012 speech at the U.N., in which he criticized the DRC and other countries "for not doing enough to stop 'an unjust war that has used violence against women and rape as a strategy of war,'" four armed men attacked his residence, held his daughters hostage, and waited to assassinate him. Upon his return, his guard intervened and was killed, but Dr. Mukwege escaped when he dropped to the ground. During his short time in exile, his patients sold pineapples and onions to raise funds needed for his return. He continues to see patients and perform surgery as well as tend to the work of the Panzi Foundation. His dedication, compassion, and personal dignity mirrored the inspiration of his work. I was honored to introduce him the next day, when he received the School of Nursing's Renfield Foundation Award for Global Women's Health. The audience of 350 gave him a standing ovation before he even spoke.

In May, we submitted a proposal to the federal government, responding to the announcement of a competitive grant to

establish a research consortium on violence against women. As a leader in this field, this was "a natural" for Ortner. We submitted a proposal that will bring together 33 accomplished researchers from 18 institutions and 16 disciplines. Although only one proposal will be funded, and the odds are always long in the field of competitive grants, we consider the comprehensive scope of our plan, Penn's exceptional support, Ortner's reputation, and the remarkable group of participants to comprise a very strong proposal. The funding decision is expected in the fall.

Thanks to a substantial, anonymous gift to the Center in March, we launched a project on how technology can be used to prevent and to perpetrate violence against women. A PhD student, master's student, and undergraduate student will examine the protection and peril presented by various forms of software and hardware technologies. They began work in late May and expect to complete a report by the end of the summer.



Denis Mukwege, M.D., Ph.D.

The gift also allows us to propose a fall symposium on this same subject that will bring together researchers, practitioners, and advocates, as well as people in government and business. We will keep you updated about this plan.

This fall, I will again teach an undergraduate course about sexual assault and violence in relationships. Enrollment is capped at 16 to allow for in-depth discussions. As happens each time I teach this course, the fall offering is already full and students are e-mailing to ask for a spot.

Thank you for your interest in the issues we address, and for your support of the Center!

Safe daughters

Confident women

Strong society