DUKE PROFESSOR CONTRIBUTES TO NEW PUBLICATION ON PREVENTING CHILD AND ADOLESCENT MENTAL ILLNESS

DURHAM, N.C. – Duke Professor E. Jane Costello is an author of “Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders among Young People: Progress and Possibilities,” which is due out March 25. The report calls for establishing new national priorities to promote mental health and to emphasize the prevention of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders.

Published by the National Academies’ Board on Children, Youth, and Families, which is a joint board of the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, the report focuses on the major advances in prevention research made over the last 15 years and lays out a policy and research agenda for the future.

According to Costello, who is associate director for research at the Center for Child and Family Policy and professor of medical psychology in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, “We now know that more than half of the adults who suffer from depression, anxiety, conduct disorder, substance abuse and other disorders can trace the onset of their problems to childhood and adolescence. In fact, in any given year, an estimated 14 percent to 20 percent of young people have one of these disorders. Knowing that, our committee focused on documenting prevention programs that teach young people the skills and habits they need to live healthy, happy and productive lives and to reduce the risk of disabling mental, emotional and behavioral disorders.”

One of the programs highlighted in the report is Fast Track, a comprehensive, 10-year intervention designed to prevent serious antisocial behavior and related adolescent problems in children entering first grade. The intervention, led by Kenneth A. Dodge, director of Duke’s Center for Child and Family Policy, has been shown to reduce self-reported antisocial behavior, conduct disorder and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder in children at highest initial risk.

Costello said, “Since early symptoms of disorders typically occur two to four years prior to the debilitating effects of the full disorder, we have a good window of opportunity for prevention efforts.”

Moving forward, federal policy needs to focus on developing systems to deliver effective prevention programs to a broad range of children and adolescents, she said. Whereas current efforts focus primarily on treatment, the White House needs to push prevention. The report estimates current costs of treating child and adolescent mental illness at upward of $247 billion annually.

The report calls for an infusion of evidence-based interventions in a range of family, school and community settings, as well as the expansion of the existing research base, including programs to monitor changes in the prevalence of mental, emotional and behavioral disorders in the general population. The committee also recommends ongoing research to understand the best targets
and timing for interventions, as well as the development of implementation strategies. In addition, the report discusses screening programs, which could be used to identify children who have risk factors for mental, emotional and behavioral disorders.

The report is the result of a two-year study sponsored by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, with supplementary funding from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.

Costello is part of the Committee on the Prevention of Mental Disorders and Substance Abuse among Children, Youth and Young Adults: Research Advances and Promising Interventions, which prepared the report.

The committee was chaired by Kenneth E. Warner, School of Public Health, University of Michigan, and Thomas Boat, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center. Other committee members are William R. Beardslee, Department of Psychiatry, Children’s Hospital Boston; Carl C. Bell, University of Illinois at Chicago, Community Mental Health Council; Anthony Biglan, Center on Early Adolescence, Oregon Research Institute; Teresa D. LaFromboise, School of Education, Stanford University; Ricardo F. Muñoz, Department of Psychology, University of California, San Francisco; Peter J. Pecora, Casey Family Programs and School of Social Work, University of Washington; Bradley S. Peterson, Director of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University; Linda A. Randolph, Developing Families Center, Washington, D.C.; and Irwin Sandler, Prevention Research Center, Arizona State University. The study director was Mary Ellen O’Connell.

For more information:  http://www.nationalacademies.org/morenews/20090213.html

The Center for Child and Family Policy, which is affiliated with the Social Science Research Institute and the Terry Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke, bridges the gap between research and public policy to improve the lives of children and families. For more information on the center, visit http://www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu/.

###

Center for Child and Family Policy
Rubenstein Hall ~ 302 Towerview Road ~ Duke University
Box 90545, Durham, NC 27708 ~ phone 919.613.9303
www.childandfamilypolicy.duke.edu