

*Notable News*



Dr. Maria Brooks

**DR. MARIA MORI BROOKS PROMOTED**

We congratulate Dr. Maria Brooks on two well-deserved accomplishments: being promoted to professor of epidemiology and being named a Co-Director of the Epidemiology Data Center (EDC). Dr. Brooks came to the EDC in 1995 to work on the Bypass Angioplasty Revascularization Investigation (BARI). Upon the completion of BARI, Maria assumed a leadership role in BARI 2D, first as the lead statistician and eventually as the Principal Investigator (PI) of two ancillary studies. Currently, she is the PI for the Study of Women Across the Nation (SWAN) Coordinating Center, which was recently renewed by the NIH for the fifth time. We wish Dr. Brooks the best on her achievements.

**TESTOSTERONE TREATMENT SHOWN FOR FIRST TIME TO BENEFIT MEN OVER 65**

Pitt Public Health was among a dozen sites nationwide to participate in the first clinical trial to show that testosterone treatment for men aged 65 and older improves sexual function, walking ability and mood. Results of The Testosterone Trials (TTrials), led by the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. “Previous testosterone trials in older men yielded equivocal and inconsistent results,” said coauthor and chair of the TTrials recruitment committee, Jane A. Cauley, Dr.P.H., professor of epidemiology and principal investigator at the study’s Pittsburgh site. “We showed that testosterone improved men’s impression that their sexual function and walking ability had improved, suggesting that these effects are clinically important.” *more from UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences*



Dr. Jane Cauley



Dr. Lewis Kuller

**COMMON HEARTBURN MEDICATIONS MAY BE LINKED TO DEMENTIA**

A German study published in the medical journal JAMA Neurology found that seniors who regularly took proton-pump inhibitors were 44% more likely to end up with dementia. The study followed more than 73,000 elderly participants to track their use of the drug class and incidence of dementia, so it did not establish a cause-and-effect relationship. In an editorial accompanying the study’s publication this week, Professor Emeritus Dr. Lewis Kuller wrote: “Whether PPIs actually cause an increase in the risk of dementia is therefore an important question requiring further evaluation ... This is a very important issue given the very high prevalence of pharmacological drugs’ long-term use in elderly populations that have a very high risk of dementia.” *more from Time*

*Notable News continued***DISEASE FORECASTING GETS BOOST FROM UNPRECEDENTED MEETING**

Health leaders in southeast Asia confirmed the high transmission of mosquito-borne dengue virus anticipated by a University of Pittsburgh-led analysis and found challenges with data-sharing to be a major bottleneck for regional epidemic forecasting. The findings come out of an unprecedented international gathering of public health scientists and officials in Kuala Lumpur recently organized by Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health and the University of Malaya. With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the meeting was convened to explore how the results of Pitt Public Health's recent study on dengue and climate can be applied to improve epidemic forecasting.

*“This was an exceptional gathering to discuss potentially life-saving public health interventions to address a possible dengue epidemic this year”*

“This was an exceptional gathering to discuss potentially life-saving public health interventions to address a possible dengue epidemic this year,” said Willem G. van Panhuis, M.D., Ph.D., assistant professor of Epidemiology at Pitt Public Health and lead author of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences paper. “It also was an opportunity to freely exchange data and preliminary epidemic forecast results, which could improve future disease forecasting at a larger scale.” *see the [Reuters article](#)*

**AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION'S FELLOWS RESEARCH DAY**

On January 22, 2016, many Epidemiology faculty participated in the American Heart Association's Fellows Research Day. This is a full day of judged oral and poster presentations by Pittsburgh area young researchers. Assistant Professors of Epidemiology Dr. Samar El Khoudary, Dr. Emma Barinas-Mitchell, and Dr. Iva Miljkovic served as judges at the event which took place at the University Club. Several of the department's students participated: Yamnia Cortes, Carrie Hanley and Jingchuan Guo. It was a very successful program that included physicians and researchers from Pitt Public Health and from Pittsburgh hospitals.

*Notable News continued***PEDIATRIC MEDICATION POISONINGS MORE LIKELY IN POOR AND RURAL AREAS**

In a radio interview, Dr. Anthony Fabio, assistant professor of epidemiology at Pitt Public Health states that thousands of children every year come to the emergency room due to poisoning from prescription medications. Recent research analyzing geographic distribution of pediatric medication exposure calls to the Pittsburgh Poison Center indicate that due to fewer available resources, more calls come from poor and rural locations. [\*listen to the NPR interview\*](#)



Dr. Anthony Fabio



Dr. Caterina Rosano

**EYE STUDY EXAMINES COGNITIVE AGING IN PEOPLE WITH DIABETES**

With funding from the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Caterina Rosano, professor of epidemiology at Pitt Public Health, is studying the eyes of a group of people with Type 1 diabetes, one of several chronic conditions that research shows may accelerate cognitive aging. Dr. Rosano thinks that poor blood flow to the brain, resulting from deterioration of the vessels, contributes to the brain's accelerated aging. Without blood, brain cells die, leading to impairment, she said. Rosano is comparing the vessel deterioration to the results of tests that measure mental abilities such as memory, information-processing speed and decision-making. She is looking at 30 years' worth of eye photos, MRIs and other information from 209 people who are part of the ongoing Pittsburgh Epidemiology of Diabetes Complications study. She plans to finish the study by the end of the year. [\*more from Trib Live\*](#)

**LIVING TO 100... NOT SO RARE ANY MORE**

"When I started practicing, it was rare to see someone of 100, but now it's not that strange at all," says Anne B. Newman, director of the Center for Healthy Aging at the University of Pittsburgh. "More people have had the opportunity to get there," largely because of advances in public health and medicine. Dr. Newman, Chair of the Department of Epidemiology at Pitt Public Health is quoted in a Washington Post article along with other longevity experts about the growing numbers of centenarians. [\*more from the Washington Post\*](#)



Dr. Anne Newman

*Notable News continued***SEDENTARY BEHAVIOR LINKED TO POOR HEALTH  
IN ADULTS WITH SEVERE OBESITY**

Sedentary behavior is associated with poor cardiovascular health and diabetes in adults with severe obesity, independent of how much exercise they perform, a Pitt Graduate School of Public Health-led study showed for the first time. The finding, published online and scheduled for the March issue of the journal *Preventive Medicine*, could be used to design and test programs for adults with severe obesity that emphasize reducing time spent sitting, rather than immediately working toward increased moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity or exercise, such as brisk walking. In the U.S., 15 percent of adults have severe obesity, placing them at high risk of cardiovascular and metabolic disease, and premature mortality. Lead author is Dr. Wendy King, associate professor in the Department of Epidemiology at Pitt Public Health and Dr. Steven Belle, professor of epidemiology is a co-author. [see article on Science Direct](#)



Dr. Wendy King



Dr. Samar El Khoudary

**BEST OF THE JOURNAL OF CLINICAL  
ENDOCRINOLOGY AND METABOLISM**

Dr. Samar El Khoudary's *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* (JCEM) manuscript entitled "Cardiovascular Fat, Menopause, and Sex Hormones in Women: The SWAN Cardiovascular Fat Ancillary Study" has been selected for a speaker slot in this year's "Best of the JCEM 2015" oral session to be held at the Endocrine Society's annual meeting. The article was among the most highly rated peer reviewed articles on this subject in all of 2015. Other authors from the Graduate School of Public Health include Dr. Karen Matthews professor of epidemiology and Dr. Emma Barinas-Mitchell, assistant professor of epidemiology.

**DR. ASHLEY NAIMI FEATURED IN SERDIGITAL WEB CONFERENCE**

On Wednesday March 2, Dr. Ashley Naimi, assistant professor of epidemiology participated in the semi-annual Society for Epidemiologic Research (SER) Web conference. The conference featured a plenary between two leading epidemiologists, and three live oral presentations selected from submitted abstracts. Dr. Naimi spoke on "Causal Mediation in Epidemiology".

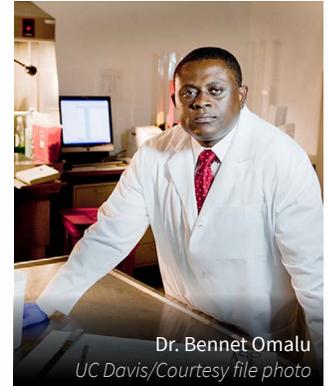


Dr. Ashley Naimi

*Notable News continued***DR. BENNET OMALU: PITTSBURGH SCREENING OF *CONCUSSION***

Several faculty had the opportunity to attend an advance screening of the movie, *Concussion*. Representing our department were Dr. Anne Newman, Dr. Lewis Kuller and Dr. Tom Songer. Dr. Bennet Omalu, the protagonist in the film, obtained an MPH degree in epidemiology while working as a forensic pathologist in the coroner's office with Dr. Cyril Wecht here in Pittsburgh. Dr. Kuller was his MPH advisor and he lectured in Dr. Songer's class. His writings about chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) became a magazine article written by a Pitt faculty member in the English Department, Jean Marie Laskas. The magazine article led to development of the film and a book by the same title. The film focuses on the life and work of Omalu, the first to report cases of CTE in professional football players, wrestlers, other high-impact sports athletes and military war veterans.

*more from the Davis Enterprise*



Dr. Bennet Omalu  
UC Davis/Courtesy file photo

Drs. Lewis Kuller, Bennet Omalu, Thomas Songer, and Anne Newman



## Alumni Corner

### ALUMNI VERONICA SANSING-FOSTER RECOGNIZED DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Dr. Veronica Sansing-Foster, who received her MS and PhD in epidemiology from Pitt Public Health in 2008 and 2010 respectively, was featured in a LinkedIn Pulse profile written by Dr. Deyanna Lewis, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Computational and Statistical Genomics Branch of Johns Hopkins Bayview/National Human Genome Research Institute. Dr. Sansing-Foster is currently a pharmacoepidemiologist at the Center for Drug Evaluation and Research (CDER) in the design and interpretation of epidemiologic research data for anti-infective and antiviral medications and medications for cardio-renal pulmonary diseases. Dr. Sansing-Foster provides mentorship to other young African-American women particularly encouraging STEM careers. Drs. Maria Mori Brooks and Gale Richardson were Veronica's academic advisors at Pitt Public Health. [full article on LinkedIn Pulse](#)



Dr. Veronica Sansing-Foster

### ALUMNI EVENT: WINTER ACADEMY

The 2016 Winter Academy, in Naples and W. Palm Beach Florida, is an annual opportunity for alumni to learn about the latest research being done at the University of Pittsburgh Schools of the Health Sciences. The program brings together administrators, faculty, and alumni to create a forum for sharing cutting-edge information in a friendly environment.

This year's event featured topics on Aging and was a great success. Dr. Anne Newman, Chair of the Department of Epidemiology, was a featured speaker and met several alumni from the Epidemiology department and Pitt Public Health. [read more](#)



## Student Corner

### LEARNING FROM PIONEERS AND BUILDING NETWORKS IN A VERY GREEN CITY:

#### *One International Student's Perspectives on Life and Study at Pitt Public Health*

Alibek Mereke's positive attitude and smile make an immediate impact on those who meet him. Since coming to Pittsburgh in fall 2014 as an MPH student, he has become an enthusiastic member of the Epidemiology community, immersed himself in Western culture, and taken full advantage of opportunities to expand skills he will take back to his home in Kazakhstan.

His can-do outlook has served him well, after he made the life-changing decision to come to the United States particularly since his motivation was tinged with sadness that spurred him on his journey, and the road to Pitt Public Health was an indirect one. "My family was in shock when I announced my plans," he said with a smile, "but they supported me."

A significant factor in Alibek's decision to pursue a health care career was his concern for family members and others stricken with illnesses after living in close proximity to a nuclear weapon test site. He earned his MD from Kazakh National Medical University in 2011, and afterwards, interned as a surgeon and worked as a junior researcher.

He knew he wanted to broaden his medical training in the US, but was keenly aware of the obstacle a language barrier could represent. To address this, he enrolled in 1.5 years of intensive English language training in Los Angeles, then applied to Pitt Public Health

Once in Pittsburgh, Alibek began discovering more "puzzle pieces," and he has cultivated relationships with colleagues and mentors who have helped him learn how they fit together and lead to other questions. "My friends here motivate me to do my best, and the challenge is to be as energetic as your professors! What makes this place unique is the people – their attitudes and responsiveness are wonderful. Class discussions have helped me learn how to become confident in expressing my thoughts and opinions."

"My MPH internship helped me understand and empathize with vulnerable populations in this country, and was great."

Alibek's exploration of this "very green" city and new life skills has taken many paths. He has camped, improved his cooking skills, gone rafting at Ohioypyle, enjoys hiking and Pittsburgh architecture, and finds traveling with friends in the US exciting.

He plans to encourage students in Kazakhstan to apply to Pitt Public Health after graduating in April 2016 and going home. "Students can learn to think broadly, and should be prepared to think globally. They should not be afraid to ask questions!"

"My goal is to impact public health not only at home, but throughout Central Asia." He envisions a program enabling US student

*"My friends here motivate me to do my best, and the challenge is to be as energetic as your professors! What makes this place unique is the people – their attitudes and responsiveness are wonderful."*

after being awarded a prestigious Bolashak Presidential International Scholarship from his country. "I wanted to learn from pioneers and build networks here. Practicing Epidemiology is like being a detective – you solve a puzzle piece by piece."

travel to Kazakhstan for learning experiences. Eventually, he may return to the US for more medical training.

More recently, Alibek was delighted to learn that he had received the Russell Rule Rycheck



Award For A Promising Master of Public Health Student. As a physician, epidemiologist, and member of the Epidemiology faculty for 42 years, Dr. Rycheck was well known for his devotion to teaching and mentoring. He often spoke of the physician's black bag of tools and believed public health professionals must also have a "Professional Bag" full of tools and skills necessary to make an impact on public health.

Alibek plans to reach out to Dr. Rycheck and hopes they may have the opportunity to communicate. Perhaps more tools will appear in his "Professional Bag" as a result!

When asked for his thoughts about leaving Pitt Public Health soon, Alibek commented, "I'm not just leaving this school. This is just the beginning."

## *Appointments & Promotions*

**DR. MARIA BROOKS**

Professor

**DR. ASHLEY NAIMI**

Assistant Professor

## *Grants*

**DR. TINA COSTACOU**

New NIH R01 “Re-evaluating the role of HDL in coronary artery disease (RETRO HDL)”

## *Honors*

**DR. CATERINA ROSANO**

elected as a member of the American Society of Clinical Investigation and will be inducted at the annual meeting in Chicago on April 15, 2016

**DR. ALLISON KUIPERS**

to receive the John Haddad Young Investigator Award at the Advances in Mineral Metabolism (AIMM) meeting on March 30, 2016 through the American Society for Bone and Mineral Research (ASBMR) in Snowmass, CO.

Her talk is entitled “Arterial Calcification: Is the Wnt Pathway a Link between Bone and the Vasculature?”

**DR. ANTHONY FABIO**

**DR. DARA MENDEZ**

recipients of the 2016 Manners Faculty Development Award and presented results from their research on January 20, 2016

**DR. SAMAR EL KHOUDARY**

selected by the Endocrine Society to receive the 2016 *Early Investigators Award* and will be recognized the Society's Annual Awards Dinner at ENDO 2016 in Boston, MA on March 31, 2016

Department of Epidemiology  
*Newsletter*

## *Submit News to the Epidemiology Newsletter*

If you have a story, award or other milestone you would like to share, please email Frani Averbach at [averbachf@edc.pitt.edu](mailto:averbachf@edc.pitt.edu) with your submission.