Greetings from the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences! The past year has brought many challenges, but, as you will see in this newsletter, we have faced them with creativity, passion, and resilience.

Our educational programs changed in new and exciting ways causing both faculty and students to learn and grow. Faculty brought classes to Zoom, moved office hours outdoors, recorded hundreds of hours of videos, and rethought much of their pedagogy. Students Zoomed from work, home, and cars, appreciated sleeping in later, mourned lost connections, and, ultimately, graduated and began fighting the pandemic as public health professionals. We couldn’t be any prouder of them.

Research and practice efforts continued across the department. Several new projects started this year including a three year collaboration with the Allegheny County Health Department by Thistle Elias, Andre Brown, Sara Baumann, and Brandi Boak to evaluate a county-wide community health worker initiative and the development of the new Population Survey Facility, led by Todd Bear and supported by the Hillman Cancer Center, to support population science in Western Pennsylvania.

Without question, this was a year unlike any other in the history of our department. I wish to thank Steve Albert who stepped down after nearly a decade as Chair for his service to the department. He has done an amazing job leading the faculty, staff and students. We hope to have a new Chair in place sometime early next year. Meanwhile, it is an exciting time for the departments of BCHS and Infectious Diseases and Microbiology to work more closely while we are in the midst of a global pandemic. As I interact with the faculty, staff and students and understand the excellent work everyone is doing in the community, it has become increasingly apparent to me that we need to be working closer together to translate our scientific advances into information that people understand, believe, and use.

Wishing everyone a great Fall!

Velpandi Ayyavoo
Interim Chair
Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences
Professor & Graduate Programs Director
Department of Infectious Diseases and Microbiology
Student research highlights

Abisola Olaniyan (PhD ’21) completed her dissertation on implicit racial bias in prenatal patient-provider communications. She used data from the Talking to Pregnant Patients study to explore patient-provider communication patterns and examine the ways that implicit bias and racism may contribute to health disparities. Her work offers a strategic, evidence-based starting point for developing policies and practices that address prenatal care inequities.

Navigating the challenge of collecting primary data during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jessica Thompson (PhD ’21) pivoted to online data collection to complete her dissertation. Her community-engaged research used Concept Mapping and Spatial Analysis to inform cardiovascular disease (CVD) prevention among rural Appalachian women in order to better inform community-specific strategies for CVD prevention among this population. She continues her work as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Kentucky.

Chinwoke Isiguzo (BCHS) led the study, Breast, Bottle, or Both?: Breastfeeding experiences of Immigrant Somali Mothers with team members Abisola Olaniyan (PhD ’21), Deena Blumenfeld (MPH) and Sarah Bigelow (MPH ’20). This qualitative study explored perspectives of Muslim Somali women in Pittsburgh to better understand how American culture has affected breastfeeding among Somali immigrants. The results, to be presented at APHA 2021, will guide the design and implementation of culturally sensitive breastfeeding promotion among Somali mothers.

Scholarships Support Students, Research

Inspired by the stories of amazing student research? Students often rely on departmental funding to support their research. These are the funds that support student research in BCHS:

The Karen S. Peterson Memorial Research Award for Women’s Health supports MPH students in their community public health work and commitment to women’s health.

The Joseph and Brigida Ricci Award assists in the recruitment and retention of BCHS students.

The Carol L. McAllister Student Resource Fund supports students who demonstrate a commitment to social justice, and a dedication to improving the lives of women and children.

The Silverman Scholarship funds doctoral work for students with undergraduate degrees in social science whose proposed dissertation reflects qualitative and ethnographic research design.

Awards from the BCHS Research Support Fund are made to BCHS students to support research toward the MPH, DrPH, or PhD degree.

2020-2021

$11,645

AWARDED IN DEPARTMENTAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Support future student research by donating to BCHS scholarships: go to publichealth.pitt.edu/giving and direct your gift to the scholarship of your choice.
Understanding vaccine misinformation on Twitter

"Vaccines are often the victim of their own success," said BCHS doctoral student **Beth Hoffman**. "I think one of the reasons we've seen a rise in anti-vaccine sentiment over the years is people are losing memory of how devastating and deadly these illnesses are."

Hoffman, along with **Kar-Hai Chu, Elizabeth Felter**, and **Jaime Sidani**, were awarded a $117,000 grant by the Richard King Mellon Foundation to study how misinformation campaign messaging is created and how it changes over time, including how it impacts different communities, such as minority populations. "Timing-wise, we have a really great opportunity here to see what public sentiment will be like for the vaccines now that they've started rolling out," said Hoffman.

**Patricia Documet** explains possible side effects of vaccination to a patient at a clinic run by Casa San Jose. Documet is the Chair of the Board of Directors at Casa San Jose, which has administered over 4,000 vaccines, primarily to Latino residents of Allegheny County.

**LGBT Youth Health is Not a Game**

But maybe someday a game can help support LGBT youths’ health? That was the question that researchers including **Jamie Egan**, **Emmett Henderson (PhD '21)**, **William Louth-Marquez (MPH '20)**, **Jordan Sang (PhD '19)**, and **Robert Coulter** hoped to answer with a role playing video game for LGBT youth. Results from a preliminary study found that delivering health content to LGBT youth (including information about coping skills, resource knowledge and use, and encouraging the youth to seek help when needed) was both feasible and acceptable and improved several health-related behaviors in the participants. Drs. Egan and Coulter are pursuing funding to conduct a larger scale trial to test whether the game-based intervention can reduce health inequities for LGBT youth.

"It's not very often that we have opportunities to commune and convene with one another and just celebrate who we are as Black queer folks."

**Andre Brown**, President of Pittsburgh Black Pride, on WESA, about the 25th Pittsburgh Black Pride week celebration.

"With my unvaccinated children, we will not be socializing maskless indoors with other families with kids."

**Stina Mair**, speaking to the New York Times on what activities epidemiologies considered safe to be doing in May 2021.
DESIGNING COVID-19 HEALTH EDUCATION VIDEOS

Elizabeth Felter, Jaime Sidani, and Steve Albert responded to a request from local Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) to develop culturally appropriate videos in English, Spanish, and Nepali to be shown in waiting rooms and distributed on social media. Videos were needed to address misconceptions about masks, social distancing, and how the virus spreads. Faculty worked with staff from a coalition of FQHC across southwest PA to ensure that videos were culturally-appropriate and acceptable across audiences.

TEACHING IN A PANDEMIC

What do you do when you can’t lead your Community Health students on your famous neighborhood walking tour of Friendship? Martha Terry was able to bring her students along for her tour with the help of fellow faculty Sara Baumann and Jessie Burke and a 360 camera.

An enduring benefit is that the video increases accessibility. Students who miss class or who have mobility issues that would prevent them from going on the tour now have an alternative way to participate.

“The walk in Friendship is meant to show students what real communities look like. I talk to students about it all - the good, the bad, the ugly.”

- Martha Terry

Cynthia Salter, and two student co-instructors, Alyssa Amendola (MPH ’20), and Laurenia Mangum (MPH), used creative reflection and literary narrative to help students identify and describe connections between their daily COVID-19 experiences and key global health concepts. Students had the opportunity to write a reflective essay, develop a narrated art or photo collection, or create a video, podcast or interpretive dance. Common themes that emerged included social determinants and intersectionality, as well as pervasive inequalities, politicalized responses to the pandemic, and mental health challenges.

Salter and Amendola presented the teaching project at Pitt’s 2021 Engaging Humanities in Health conference.

Students submitted narrated photo collections of scenes from around Pittsburgh in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Art Heals After 2015 Nepal Earthquake

Published in Health Promotion Practice’s Arts in Public Health Special Supplement, Sara Baumann, Monica Merante (MPH, ’21) and Jessie Burke share findings that explore community art and its role in promoting health, social cohesion and community resilience in the aftermath of the 2015 Nepal mega-earthquake. Embracing creative tools in research dissemination, they created a website and a virtual art gallery to showcase the community art works and take viewers through an interactive experience of the research findings (arheals.pitt.edu). This work set the foundation for a new study they are starting this fall with Liz Kaselitz (PhD) that explores the role of and the mechanisms behind community art and their impacts on mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic in Pittsburgh.

Freedom House 50th Anniversary Celebrated

Freedom House Enterprises ambulance services was a pioneering program designed to simultaneously provide a pathway for upward mobility and address a severe disparity in pre-hospital care in Pittsburgh’s Hill District in the 1960s and 1970s. The collaboration between Phil Hallen (Lecturer, BCHS), Peter Safar, and James McCoy Jr., developed into a groundbreaking endeavor that shaped modern EMS and put Pittsburgh in the forefront of pre-hospital services.

BCHS student Antonio Gumuccio (MPH) and alumnae Indira Renae Hunter (MPH ’20) brought together nearly a dozen public health, medical, and emergency services professionals including Hallen, Gumuccio, and Dan Swayne (DrPH, ’09) to discuss the the lasting impacts of the groundbreaking service in a Grand Rounds event held September 2020. The event was archived and is available on the Pitt Public Health YouTube page.

Violence Prevention Initiative Builds Community

Richard Garland sees drugs and alcohol as the foundation of gun violence in Pittsburgh, but acknowledges that during the last year social media has fueled the problem as people “look for their 50 seconds of fame” online. This insight is borne out in the numbers of homicides in the county, sharply up from last year’s, and documented in the project’s 2020 Homicide Review Report.

Reimagine Reentry, another project Garland directs through the Violence Prevention Initiative, aims to reduce recidivism through case management, job training, family reunification education, and housing assistance. The typical client of Reimagine Reentry is 28 years old, male, single, Black, and living in temporary housing. Nearly all are interested in construction for job training. An evaluation is on-going, but in the initial cohorts, there was a 70% graduation rate from initial employment. The Initiative also recently received funding from the R.K. Mellon Foundation to begin a violence prevention program in McKeesport.
**Chongyi Wei** (DrPH ’09) is an Associate Professor at Rutgers University School of Public Health. Wei attributes his research and teaching interests to his time spent at Pitt Public Health. "Pitt Public Health cultivated my deep appreciation for the field of public health, its principle of social justice. I was fortunate enough to have some of the best advisors and mentors, who helped me establish a vision for my research and career and cared for me on a personal level."

**Kamden Hoffmann** (PhD ’13) has been working for over a year as Technical Director for Social and Behavior Change at Corus International, under MOMENTUM Integrated Health Resilience, a five-year USAID funded project to improve the health and well-being of women and children in fragile and conflict-affected settings globally. This project builds on her two decades of experience in global health work, including work in the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, and Zambia, and numerous other countries through short term technical assistance. She is on the COVID-19 task force for Corus and is leading risk communication/community engagement efforts for COVID-19 rollout in the DRC under the project to address vaccine uptake issues. She supports South Sudan, Sudan, Niger, Burkina Faso, Tanzania, DRC, and Mali, with new countries on the horizon.

**Keon L. Gilbert** (DrPH ’09) was recently named to the 3rd Class of Brookings Institutions Rubenstein Fellows. He is an Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioral Science and Health Education at the College for Public Health and Social Justice at Saint Louis University and co-founding director of the Institute for Healing Justice and Equity, a center focused on eliminating disparities in health caused by systemic oppression. His writings have recently been featured in the Guardian and he co-edited the recent Racism: Science & Tools for the Public Health Professional, available through APHA Press. Follow him at eDrKLG4Health

To facilitate growth and collaboration, **Tabitha Reefer** (MPH ’15) launched The San Diego Public Health Professionals Networking Group. It is a space where professionals can share ideas, promote job opportunities, and discover others with similar goals and interests. As the group grows, there may be social meetups, volunteer opportunities, and educational seminars. Please join her if you are in the area and share with your network to help grow the group.

https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9037077/
Faculty and Staff News

BCHS welcomed **Kar-Hai Chu** to the faculty this year. He brings a focus on tobacco control, social network analysis, social media, and cancer prevention.

Another welcome to **Emily Dauria**. She is a behavioral scientist with expertise in mixed-methods research and a focus on those affected by the criminal legal system.

**Sara Baumann** is a familiar face in BCHS, but we are now welcoming her to the ranks of faculty! She continues her work in participatory & creative visual research methods, women’s reproductive health, and mental health.

We also can’t exactly say “welcome” to **Kathleen Ali** since she has been with Pitt Public Health since 2018, but we are so pleased to now have her as the Assistant to the Chair in BCHS.

A final welcome to **Jaime Sidani**. Her research interests include emerging tobacco products, vaccine hesitancy, health communication, and youth engagement and empowerment.

2020-2021 brought its share of retirements. We bid fond farewell to **Ron Stall, Sue Cotter, and Jen King**, and wish them well on their future endeavors!

**Steve Albert** stepped down after nearly 10 (!) years as Department Chair. He will be traveling to Japan in early 2022 on a Fulbright Scholarship.

**Mary Hawk** served as President of the Pitt Public Health Faculty Senate Executive Committee for the 2020-2021 term.

**Jessie Burke** was named Interim Vice Dean of Pitt Public Health.

**Thistle Elias** was named the school’s Director of Community Engagement.

**Jamie Egan** was named Vice Chair of Practice in BCHS.

For the latest faculty and staff news, please visit: http://publichealth.pitt.edu/behavioral-and-community-health-sciences/whos-who/