Letter from the Chair

As we complete four months of quarantine precautions, I think of this quote from German Chancellor Angela Merkel, “You cannot fight the pandemic with lies and disinformation any more than you can fight it with hate or incitement to hatred.” Wise words I wish many more would heed.

BCHS is on the front lines of research and outreach to counter disinformation. We continue to marshal evidence to demonstrate the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on minority communities. We are working with community organizations to track local efforts to support social distancing and access to testing. Our faculty and students work directly with health departments across the country to communicate accurate information and develop programs to monitor testing and isolation of cases. We are actively engaged in planning for the return of students to campus and restarting community research.

Our students and alumni, including our newest graduates--the Class of 2020--face one of the most severe public health challenges in living memory. They are well trained, and I have no doubt their efforts will help bring the pandemic to heel. You can follow their successes and the work of our faculty and staff on Facebook, in the weekly Chair’s newsletter, and at publichealth.pitt.edu/bchs. Finally, I hope you will consider supporting students more directly as well with a gift to our scholarship funds. They are critical now, more than ever, to ensuring equity and justice in access to education. See page 7 for more information on how to give.

Steven M. Albert, PhD
Professor and Chair
Creating Community During COVID-19: A Virtual Gallery Exploring Resilience, Social Cohesion, and Creativity

Jessie Burke and Sara Baumann co-created the #PittCreatingCommunity project in partnership with the Pitt Office of the Provost. The virtual art project provided an opportunity for Pitt students, faculty, and staff to nurture a sense of community by creating, connecting, and sharing experiences navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. The submissions highlight how members of our Pitt community have been creatively adapting during the pandemic.

Conversations About COVID

This year has revealed how much there is still to learn about COVID-19. Throughout the summer, Jessie Burke facilitated presentations by Pitt Public Health experts about the pandemic. BCHS speakers included Noble Maseru and Patricia Documét who addressed issues of inequities and Steve Albert and Beth Hoffman (PhD student) who discussed the role of online misinformation. Videos of all the presentations are available at: https://publichealth.pitt.edu/covid-19/conversations

What Are the Results of Social Distancing?

"I THINK ONE OF OUR WORST MISTEPS IN THE BEGINNING WAS CALLING THIS WHOLE THING ‘SOCIAL DISTANCING.’ REALLY, THE VERY LAST THING WE WANT IS TO BE SOcialLY DISTANT."

Elizabeth Felten, on WESA 90.5 FM, on preferring the term "PHYSICAL DISTANCING"

Jessie Burke, Stina Mair and Robert Coulter are conducting a study on the health and social consequences of COVID-19 social distancing. The web-based survey of Allegheny County residents aims to understand the impacts of stay-at-home orders and social distancing on routine activities, alcohol and other substance use, intimate partner violence, sexual behaviors, and mental health. The study will explore if these shifts have had a differential impact on sexual and gender minority adults.

Training, Stigma and COVID-19 in Egypt

Mary Hawk is collaborating on a study to assess job satisfaction experienced by psychiatrists in Cairo, Egypt. The mixed-methods study focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on psychiatric training and stigma. This collaborative was formed after Hawk presented an evaluation lecture at Cairo University in February. Of the collaboration, Hawk said, “It’s exciting to be able to mentor a team of six psychiatrists at Cairo University who are leading this project, and to be able to extend our collaboration.”

COVID-19 cases continue to rise in Egypt and present a challenge to clinicians working in the mental health arena. "Our aims are twofold: to build qualitative expertise, given these methods are not widely used at Cairo University, and to uncover opportunities to reduce burnout in Egyptian psychiatrists with the ultimate goal of improving delivery of care."

Taking Action During COVID-19

PHOTOS: MONICA MERANTE), NOELLE AND ERIN MILLER, JENNY JONES

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For 23 years, Bridging the Gaps (BTG) Pittsburgh has provided health and social service professional students with opportunities to work directly with local, underserved communities. The aim is to better understand their health concerns and needs, and provide health-related services, outreach and support to organizations that are on the front lines of health care. Housed in BCHS and co-directed by Thistle Elias, BTG Pittsburgh has placed interns in interdisciplinary pairs with any one of a range of different underserved populations in Pittsburgh, including people in recovery, children, homeless women or many other at risk populations.

Over the years, BTG Pittsburgh, has placed over 350 students at over 50 organizations, with many organizations in long-term partnership for a decade or more. The 22nd BTG Pittsburgh Symposium, held in August 2019, celebrated the work of 20 students placed in organizations around Allegheny County, and included a walking tour of Braddock, led by the Braddock Youth Project.

BTG staff quickly realized that Summer 2020 would be unlike anything in the organization’s previous 22 years. How do you take a program based on community engagement and immersive, face-to-face interactions and move it online in the matter of a few weeks? (Story continues on the next page)
Healing Through Art

BTG student interns, Abisola Olaniyan (DrPH), and Kiyomi Knox (Social Work), learned valuable lessons about the healing power of art in their placement with Gwen's Girls, a local non-profit that serves at-risk girls and young women. The pair found that art was a meaningful vehicle through which teen girls could safely explore topics such as grief, stress, and self-discovery.

The interns designed an art curriculum for Gwen's Girls program participants. The curriculum included creating butterfly art to discuss body positivity and learning about kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery. The programming was particularly valuable because the local school does not offer art.

Olaniyan remarked, "I applied to the program to learn more about the vulnerable or at-risk populations in Pennsylvania. I learned this and more. I was able to learn about the relevance of art and its use in improving psychological, social and emotional wellbeing."

BTG: Pittsburgh "Remote 2020"

(continued from page 4.) "We had to think through what needed to stay and what needed to change," noted Elias.

Elias was thrilled that nearly all students who had been accepted into the immersive program chose to stay in the program and serve host organizations remotely. Students developed health curriculum, resource guides, training manuals and community needs assessments to help build the capacity of eight organizations serving on the front lines of human services in the county.

While students always learn valuable lessons in BTG, this year’s cohort certainly got extra lessons in flexibility and adaptation!

Want to know more about BTG Pittsburgh? Watch the video created by Sara Baumann for their 20th anniversary: https://tinyurl.com/yatjfozd
Camilo Ruiz (MPH), in conjunction with artists from Pittsburgh and Texas, spearheaded a community-based mural project aimed to bring visibility to Pittsburgh's Latinx community. Over the course of five days, 20 volunteers, including children and adults, with diverse backgrounds painted the 20’ x 8’ mural with images of migration and everyday life. “The project aimed at giving visibility to the Pittsburgh and US Latinx communities through a joyous mural that speaks of our migration journeys, our memories and nostalgias, and a hopeful future,” said Ruiz.

Patricia Documét provided guidance, both as Ruiz’s academic advisor and in her role as president of the board for Casa San Jose, which supported the event. She reflected, “Camilo had the opportunity to experience how communal art can both channel the perspectives of Latinx in Pittsburgh, often voiceless and invisible, and help create a sense of unity among participants.” Ruiz added, “This project is part of an effort to highlight the long-lasting Latinx presence in Pittsburgh, many times ignored and forgotten in a context that often reads issues of inequality in black and white. We wanted to make another statement of our brown presence in Pittsburgh.”

The mural was unveiled at an art gallery crawl in Friendship in November and will be installed in August 2021 in Pitt’s Hillman Library remodeled 3rd floor. The effort was supported by a Pitt Year of Creativity Grant.

James Egan and Andre Brown are participating in a multi-university research collaboration to examine resilience and healthy aging among middle-aged and older men who have sex with men (MSM). The Understanding Patterns of Healthy Aging among MSM is a NIMHD-funded longitudinal study designed to understand the factors that facilitate optimal aging among middle-aged and older MSM. Egan, Brown, and colleagues recently published manuscripts from this study in *The Gerontologist* and *AIDS*. They also presented their research at several national and international conferences, including at the American Public Health Association and the International Academy of Sex Research.

A team from Pitt Public Health including Noble Maseru, Lora Ann Bray, and Kyanna Williams-Pate (MPH ’19) continued its collaboration with Community Empowerment Association (CEA) to host neighborhood conversations about life expectancy in Homewood and McKeesport. Through the *Live Longer Empowering and Engaging Pittsburgh Communities Project*, the team used gathered insights from residents about community assets and suggestions to improve life expectancy. This project was recognized as a "Partnership to Watch" at Pitt’s 2020 Community Engaged Scholarship Forum.

Noble Maseru examines the legacy of slavery at the “400 Years of Inequality Symposium” in September.
Alex Topper (MPH ’17) is currently a part of the Seattle King County COVID-19 emergency response team. Her team’s research explores the epidemiology of COVID-19 in long term care facilities and has been accepted for publication in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Emma Hosman (MPH ’17) works at the Philadelphia Department of Public Health as the Community Resilience Coordinator. Since March she has worn many hats, including coordinating their Medical Reserve Corps and transportation for materials, swabs, specimens, and donations.

Esther Hwang (MPH ’08) is completing an Emergency Medical Services (EMS) fellowship at Emory University. During the pandemic, Esther’s day-to-day has included field response with the EMS clinicians, supporting the ambulance providers, and updating clinical care guidelines to help EMS with patient care. After the fellowship, Esther will join the faculty of the Emory University Department of Emergency Medicine as an attending physician.

4

Named Scholarships

$500–$1,500
per award for research support

Help support the future of public health: email phgive@pitt.edu to find out how to fund BCHS scholarships.

Thank you!
BCHS welcomed Cynthia Salter to the faculty in January. Dr. Salter's research focuses on maternity care and birth experiences, and she has a special interest in birth trauma. She is also an affiliated faculty member of the Global Studies Center.

Daniel Jacobson López was selected as a Career Education and Enhancement for Health Care Research Diversity (CEED) Scholar (2020-2021) in the Institute for Clinical Research Education. The award will support his work with gay Latino and Black sexual assault survivors. He was also named Chair of Diversity and Inclusion for the University of Pittsburgh Postdoctoral Association.

Ron Stall was honored with the 2020 NIH Sexual and Gender Minority Distinguished Investigator Award from the National Institutes of Health, Sexual and Gender Minority Research Office.

Martha Terry, adjunct faculty Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA), was honored with a Certificate of Distinction "for outstanding teaching and lasting contributions to GSPIA."

Richard Garland received the Trauma Prevention Recognition Award from the American Trauma Society, Pennsylvania Division.

Stina Mair was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

Jessie Burke was named Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Elizabeth Felter and Sara Baumann (Postdoctoral Associate) were awarded “2019 Paper of the Year” from Pedagogy in Health Promotion for their manuscript, Development of a Community-Engaged Classroom for Teaching Health Communications: Lessons Learned from Nine Semesters of Implementation.

Best wishes to Noble Maseru as he transitions to Director of Health Sciences Equity, Social Justice in the Office of the Senior Vice Chancellor.

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