



# Department of Community Health Sciences Newsletter

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## Message from Department Chair Martin Iguchi

I am honored to have this opportunity to introduce myself to you as the Chair of Community Health Sciences, particularly since I am following in the distinguished footsteps of Dr. Anne Pebley.

The year has been a particularly difficult one as the State's budget cuts have seriously impacted resources at all levels. As a result, we have had to cut back on course availability, funding for special readers, and a variety of other activities and opportunities. Faculty and staff were required to take furloughs, but worked hard to protect time devoted to students. Nonetheless, the overall impact is cumulative and slowly corrosive, so we recognize the need to take compensatory action, and to reach out to all our constituents for participatory solutions.

Specifically, I am asking for your help with three things: First, involvement. I seek alumni interested in serving on a chairs council. I also invite alumni to speak with our students regarding your own work in public health, both in small group and seminar settings. I also seek a volunteer who can advise or assist the department in the enhancement of our web site and/or other technology driven solutions. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact me directly: [iguchi@ucla.edu](mailto:iguchi@ucla.edu). Second, I ask for your assistance in broadening our reach on behalf of current students. Let us know of job and/or internship opportunities and ideas about how we can use our professional networks to create opportunities for students. Please contact our Student Affairs Officer Tanya Youssephzadeh if you can assist us in this area: [chssao@ph.ucla.edu](mailto:chssao@ph.ucla.edu). Third, we would be grateful for financial contributions to the department. We need to increase investment in our students now and in the future, in order to train the public health workforce that we

need. Your contributions will go into a fund that will be used to directly support student education. This support can be in any amount. Every \$1 is meaningful when combined with the contributions of others. If you are willing to make a contribution, please see the end of this newsletter for information on how to do so.

As is always the case, adversity also brings opportunity. The financial crisis has increased demand for more education, increasing our applicant pool and allowing us to admit impressive students. The global financial crisis also shines a light on the increasing numbers of homeless, uninsured, persons living in poverty, and the constellations of health problems that emerge from such increasingly challenging environments. We are committed to educating our students to meet these challenges and hope you will join us in this effort.

## Alumni Spotlight: Priti Gautam



People frequently ask CHS Alumna Priti Gautam, MPH, why she changed focus from economics as an undergraduate to public health in graduate school. Although

these issues can seem unrelated, Gautam is surprised that the linkages between economics, development and health are not more obvious to everyone.

Her interest in public health developed during her pre-med studies as an undergrad at Boston College. However, she began rethinking her goals after taking the mandatory organic chemistry class. Despite a change in course, she remained interested in health. In 2006 she won a fellowship at the the Cancer Research Center of Hawaii where she was introduced to public health. She was attracted to the interdisciplinary nature of the field and saw in it an opportunity to learn about the intersections between her two main interests, economics and health. Gautam applied to UCLA's Public Health program because she believed that UCLA - as one of the top research institutions in the field -- could provide a solid foundation for her career.

Gautam's experience at UCLA was even better than she expected. She cites working with such accomplished professionals as Dr. Paula Tavrow and Dr. Linda Bourque as some of the highlights of her experience at UCLA. "They really cared about their students and wanted to share their knowledge and skills with us. I felt really prepared for the 'real' world during their courses and working with them outside of class." Gautam's field work in Nepal was particularly important to her professional development. "There was one instance where I was dropped off in the middle of a village, by myself, didn't know the local dialect or how to navigate the area, and was expected to conduct interviews with 10 contraceptive users. But I did it! It was one of the most empowering experiences of my life!"

Although Gautam is no longer roaming around villages collecting data about contraceptive preferences, she continues to work in reproductive health. Gautam is currently a Global Health Program Director at the non-profit advocacy organization Americans for Informed Democracy. She is mobilizing college students throughout the US to fight for global sexual and reproductive health and rights. Gautam says her current job, like her experience during her internship in Nepal, is empowering. Because she works for a smaller organization, she can do things that would normally be done by others in a larger organization. She says, "I do everything from speaking to funders and making copies, to attending coalition meetings, making phone calls, training students, designing programs, creating surveys, and speaking to policymakers. I've really used all of the skills I gained from UCLA and more."

Since starting her position a few months ago, Gautam has succeed in obtaining funding for a program she developed. She recently went on a five-state tour with Advocates for Youth and reproductive health activists from Nigeria and Jamaica, giving presentations and training to US students, and having discussions with policymakers about the need for increased US leadership and funding for global sexual and reproductive rights and health.

What Gautam appreciates most about the organization is its focus on the interconnections between issues in global health, development, and the environment.

In the future, Gautam says she wants to continue working in global health. Her next career move, whenever that may be, will definitely be overseas.

## Snapshots: CHS Faculty Participation in Public Health

CHS faculty members are involved in a project funded by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute to establish a "Center for Population Health and Health Disparities." The grant includes three projects, each of which will take a different approach to reducing cardiovascular disease risk among Latinos in East Los Angeles. Drs. Deborah Glik and Mike Prelep (CHS) and Dr. Alex Ortega (Health Services) are co-directors of a project that will conduct "corner store makeovers" - making fresh fruits and vegetables available in small local stores. East LA, like many urban communities, is considered a "food dessert" because residents have poor access to major supermarkets but an abundance of fast food restaurants, small convenience stores, and other unhealthy food options. This project will be among the first in the nation to study the feasibility and sustainability of corner store makeovers, as well as the impact that they have on the health behaviors of the community. The project will also work with local high school students to promote healthy food purchasing, cooking, and eating.

## A New Organization in the SPH



During orientation in September 2009, entering CHS masters student Sandra Matossian noticed that the School of Public Health lacked a student organization that focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues. She contacted Assistant Dean for Student Affairs Dave Clark who was provided help and

guidance establishing a new LGBT- focused organization. Dean Rosenstock was enthusiastic and supportive throughout the entire process. Matossian enlisted support from fellow CHS masters students Karin Hilton and Brock Dumville and Epidemiology Ph.D. student Earl Burrell. By Winter Quarter of 2010, the new group, Queers for Public Health (QPH), received UCLA student organization status.

The turnout for the first QPH meeting on January 13, 2010 was large and included students, faculty, and staff from the School of Public Health, the School of Medicine, and the School of Nursing. It was clear that there was high demand for an organization dedicated to the LGBT community, not only within the SPH, but within the UCLA Center for Health Sciences campus in general.

To date QPH has held several meetings and reunions. QPH currently has 26 members who meet regularly to discuss LGBT issues and ways to facilitate change. During this year's Public Health Week, QPH co-sponsored a speaker event in which Susan Cohen, MPH, discussed important elements of cultural competency and how it applies to providing responsive programs and services for the LGBT community. More recently, QPH highlighted the latest efforts made by the Arthur Ashe Student Health and Wellness Center to address transgendered health care on campus. QPH members also attended the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) Media Awards young adult party. GLAAD recognizes and honors media for fair, accurate, and inclusive portrayal of the LGBT community and the issues that affect their lives.

(<http://www.glaad.org/mediaawards>).

Like all new organizations, QPH has faced obstacles. For example, it has been difficult to secure funding for events. Members plan to collaborate with existing organizations in the SPH and in the greater UCLA campus to increase recognition of QPH within the student community. Future QPH plans include creating a website and starting a sexual health education program for LGBT undergrads at UCLA in partnership with the LGBT Campus Resource Center. As Sandra Matossian explains "being LGBT can be an isolating experience. Tailoring a sexual health program for needs of LGBT undergrads makes them feel included, increases their knowledge, and promotes safer practices. What better group to design a program for these undergrads than LGBT public health students! We are very excited about this opportunity." QPH also plans to promote the development of a queer curriculum or sexual minority health course within the SPH. Matossian explains, "It is important for students to learn about LGBT health and life issues in an academic setting. We learn about risk factors for African Americans, Latinos, and Asians, but not enough information is given to build the skills necessary to work with the LGBT community. If we don't receive proper training about how to interact with and plan programs for these populations, we are not prepared to care for them or improve their health outcomes." QPH also plans to estab-

lish a regular speaker series and to hold more socializing events as a means of establishing a presence on campus as well as building a community interested in LGBT health.

### The Queers for Public Health Mission

Queers for Public Health (QPH) aims to build and support a queer community with presence in the School of Public Health and broader health science campus through educational events, social networking, and collaboration with other students, faculty, and staff. Primary goals include highlighting the specific needs of gender and sexual minorities domestically and abroad. We intend to address heterosexism in healthcare settings and the importance of LGBTQI cultural competency not only in our practice as public health professionals, but also within school of public health curriculum.

If CHS alumni would like to advise and/or support Queers for Public Health efforts, please contact them at [gph@ucla.edu](mailto:gph@ucla.edu).

## CHS in the Field: Tibetan Regions of the People's Republic of China



*Wang and Gipson with their students*

CHS faculty, including **Drs. May Wang and Jessica Gipson**, have begun collaborating with Tso-Ngon (Qinghai) University Tibetan Medical College in Qinghai Province, China (a traditionally Tibetan region). The goal of the collaboration is to support the development of educational and research opportunities for faculty and students at both institutions. Dr. Kunchok Gyaltzen, who has just received his PhD in CHS at UCLA, will return to Tso-ngon this summer and take a position as Associate Professor. A number of professors and graduate students from the Tibetan Medical College have visited UCLA over the past four years, and last summer Wang and Gipson traveled to Siling (Xining) to teach an introductory seminar about public health methods and fieldwork.

The two-week seminar was attended by both faculty and students of the medical college.

Wang and Gipson presented key concepts of public health during six-hour sessions that included both lecture and small-group work. However, course provided education for both students and for the instructors. As Gipson recalls, "Right at the beginning of the first lecture one of the students asked what we meant by health. I gave the standard definition of health as a state of physical, mental, and social wellbeing; the classic biomedical definition. But according to Tibetan medicine, one does not have physical well-being without mental well-being and social well-being. For them, there are not three separate concepts but one larger, holistic idea of health. It is a very compelling idea, and one not espoused by the traditional, Western biomedical paradigm, so right from the beginning we knew that this was going to be a great learning experience for us, too."



*In the classroom*

During two weekend trips around Tso-Ngon, Wang and Gipson visited health departments and health centers at the village, county, and provincial, levels. Here they not only got a firsthand look at the region's health system, but also learned about the top public health priorities, which included sexually-transmitted infections, hypertension, and food-borne illnesses. They also visited the recently opened Tibetan Birth Center funded by the Tibetan Healing Fund, a nonprofit organization founded by Dr. Kunchok Gyaltsen. The Birth Center, which at last count had already delivered 100 babies and extended health services to over 2,000 rural women, provides families in the region with a culturally appropriate, holistic birth experience that may not be possible in local hospitals. Special features include birthing suites in the traditional Tibetan style for mothers and their families that are available both before and after birth.

This trip will be just one in a series of exchanges between UCLA and the Tso-Ngon University Tibetan Medical College. In fact, Dr. Gipson and Dr. Pebley are planning to return to Tso-Ngon University this summer to

teach a short course on research methodology. As Wang and Gipson's trip shows, faculty and staff at both schools can benefit from collaborative teaching, research, and training between the institutions.



*Tibetan Birth Center*

## CHS Students in the Field

**Maria Pia Chaparro**, a second year doctoral student, spent the past summer doing research in her hometown, Lima, Peru. Chaparro was investigating the role that food assistance programs play in the country's rising obesity rates. The programs, which distribute food supplements in poor neighborhoods, may inadvertently contribute to obesity by giving extra food to households that do not need it. "Researchers in other Latin American countries have found a link between national food assistance programs and obesity, but this type of research doesn't exist in Peru," said Chaparro. "With Peru's rising obesity rates, it's extremely important to know if our food programs are contributing to the problem." Chaparro has conducted focus groups with program participants, workers, and administrators. The focus groups revealed that obesity is already recognized as a problem in Lima and that participants were interested in learning about obesity prevention and physical activity. As her research progresses, Chaparro hopes to return to Lima and examine the paradox of rising rates of obesity in predominantly poor neighborhoods.

## Student Organization Updates

### **PHSA**

The Public Health Students Association (PHSA) goal for the year was to foster more student involvement. To help students get to know one another, PHSA began the year with a back to school social event, a UCLA football game, and a team participating in the AIDS Walk. To get more students involved in PHSA and SPH as a whole, PHSA requested applications from students who wanted to

serve on faculty and PHSA committees. Throughout the school year, two meetings are held each quarter.

PHSA sponsors a speaker series, with topics ranging from global health opportunities and health care reform to career services. This speaker series has increased the overall communication between faculty and students and helped increase attendance at meetings. For the first time this year, PHSA had enough funding through the Graduate Students Association to distribute small grants to other SPH organizations like the Reproductive Health Interest Group and Students of Color for Public Health. A total of nine student organizations received funding to host events that would benefit the study body. PHSA has been involved in a range of other activities from Global Health Week and Public Health Week to an intramural softball team. As in past years, PHSA organized an end of the year banquet at the end of the spring quarter. This year, it was off campus at Sheraton Delfina in Santa Monica. Throughout the year, PHSA Executive Board also met frequently with Dean Rosenstock and Associate Dean Hilary Godwin, and Assistant Dean Dave Clark about student needs. PHSA is proud that that communication with students, faculty, additional graduate programs, and alumni has increased over the 2009 - 2010 academic year.

#### **RHIG**

The Reproductive Health Interest Group (RHIG) continues to be very active in the School of Public Health, with ongoing outreach to faculty and graduate students in the health and medical fields. This past year, RHIG's **Adult Film Industry Subcommittee** worked with the LA County and AIDS Healthcare Foundation to push for legislation to mandate the use of condoms. They hosted a Strategy Symposium at UCLA in the Fall which brought together partners from across the state to develop a joint strategy to make the adult industry safer for performers. Members of the subcommittee also traveled to San Francisco to meet with adult film production companies and health professionals. They also testified before the Cal/OSHA Standards Board and argued for creation of an Advisory Committee to examine the Bloodborne Pathogen Standard and to clarify protection standards for workers in the adult film industry.

RHIG's newest subcommittee, **Global Health**, decided to focus on three areas: trafficking, AIDS, and global family planning. Its first major event concerned trafficking, and was co-hosted by LA's Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) and the Art and Global Health Center. The event included of a film and presentation on CAST's work. RHIG also co-hosted an event on people living with HIV, called "Through Positive Eyes." The subcommittee hosted a session on the Global Gag Rule, to encourage discussion about international reproductive health issues. In addition, RHIG's **Outreach and Education Subcommittee** developed four interactive presentations on reproductive health topics for fraternities and sororities at UCLA. They expect to make a similar presentation at a multi-service residential agency for court-

ordered adolescent boys later this year. Finally, RHIG's **Speaker Subcommittee** sponsored a movie screening of "The Business of Being Born" to educate the UCLA community on the medicalization of childbirth in the United States. Dr Kimberley Gregory gave a brief talk on her experiences and led a Q&A session.

If any alumni would like to support RHIG by purchasing a t-shirt with RHIG's new logo, please contact RHIG at [uclaRHIG@gmail.com](mailto:uclaRHIG@gmail.com)

#### **Mobile Clinic and RHOP**

Mobile Clinic Project (MCP): After a smooth transition in leadership, the UCLA Mobile Clinic Project (MCP) is embarking upon its 11th year of service to the homeless and indigent community in Los Angeles. The clinic is entirely student-run and aims to improve the quality of life and health outcomes of its clients. It provides direct medical care, health promotion and disease prevention, legal support and referrals for health and social services. MCP continues to serve its original site in West Hollywood (on the corner of Sycamore and Romaine) every Wednesday and serves two sites in Santa Monica on alternating Saturdays: Step Up on Second, a mental health clinic, and Ocean Park Community Center (OPCC). MCP's Reproductive Health Outreach Project (RHOP) is in its second year at Common Ground, a community HIV center that holds weekly drop-in hours for homeless youth. RHOP provides sexual health education and peer-support to this extremely vulnerable population. RHOP is currently conducting formative research to expand its activities beyond reproductive health. The MCP Medical students, and Public Health grad students and undergraduates are working towards "Mobile Clinic 2.0," a comprehensive system of chronic care for our clients. Since we have recognized that we are the primary care provider for more than 40 percent of our clients, the MCP team is working to continue providing the best care possible to the homeless - with the overall mission of improving our clients' quality of life and well being.

#### **SCPH**

This year, the 2009-2010 Students of Color for Public Health (SCPH) Executive Board and newly created Executive Council continue to improve upon the achievements of previous years. With increased financial support from the Dean's Office, the Student Affairs Office and outside sources, a close alliance with the Diversity Coordination Team, more filled leadership positions, and an enlarged general membership, SCPH is having a more significant impact on Public Health Students, and the campus community at large.

In addition to the SCPH Professional Speaker Series, Social Networking Events, General Body Meetings, and Annual Public Health Week, the group has significantly restructured its mentoring and outreach activities. Specifically, it has developed a comprehensive campus mentoring program for public health majors and minors and created a mentorship program targeting charter high

schools in underserved areas. SCPH served over 200 students through our mentorship programs this year.

Other new initiatives include a formal research project to assess the diversity climate at UCLA's School of Public Health (co-executed with the Diversity Coordination Team), the creation of a quarterly student-faculty-alumni dinner modeled after the campus-wide "Dinner for 12," a school-wide fitness challenge (Step It Up for Health: Haiti 2010), targeted outreach efforts and consulting to admitted, prospective students of color to the School of Public Health, and a presentation on our activities at the annual California Wellness Foundation Conference on "Increasing Diversity in the Health Professions."

For information on how to continue (or begin) your involvement in Students of Color for Public Health as alumni, please contact at [scph@ucla.edu](mailto:scph@ucla.edu).

## Alumni Updates

**Shonali Choudhury** (class of 2009) has been working as a postdoctoral fellow at the Hispanic Health Council in Hartford, CT. She works with the Center for Eliminating Health Disparities among Latinos and the Center for Risk Reduction. Choudhury works on a variety of projects including developing a nutrition intervention that works with local Latino communities and local farmers; HIV prevention and management for substance using women of color; research on gender roles, sexual scripts, and HIV risk among Puerto Rican women; and evaluation of a community newsletter targeted to community health workers/promotoras. She is also a member of the Community Research Core with Yale University's CIRA (Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS). Choudhury has successfully published her first article from her dissertation: *'As prostitutes, we control our bodies': perceptions of health and body in the lives of establishment-based female sex workers in Tijuana, Mexico* which has been published by the journal *Culture, Health & Sexuality*.

**Dana Ellis Hunnes** (class of 2007) is in her first year of the Ph.D. program at the UCLA School of Public Health in the department of Community Health Sciences. She has continued to work as a clinical heart transplant dietitian at Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. Dana is happy to announce that she got married on May 24, 2009.

After obtaining her MPH in June of 2008, **Tracy Line** (class of 2008) became a Certified Health Education Specialist (CHES) and is also Certified in Public Health (CPH). She is currently working at the Center for American Indian and Indigenous Research and Education (CAIIRE) at the UCLA School of Nursing as a Project Director for a research study helping Southwest American Indian cancer patients and their families to cope with cancer. Tracy is also getting married on June 19, 2010!

Last year **Carolyn McCoy** (class of 2009) was in Washington DC visiting friends and went to visit her internship supervisor, unaware that the H1N1 outbreak has just begun. McCoy completed her internship in the summer of 2008 at the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization Emergency Operations Center. The center was in full response when she stopped by for the visit. She was asked if she was available to work and, thus, spent two and a half months as an Emergency Operations Officer. During the outbreak McCoy attended high level, daily meetings and press conferences and was in charge of writing daily situation reports as well as resource mobilization for Mexico. "I was so grateful that luck met preparation. It was an experience of a lifetime," said McCoy. She is currently working at the National Association of County and City Health Officials on the Public Health Preparedness project. Specifically, she works on a project funded by the CDC-funded Division of Global Migration and Quarantine.

**Mascha (Propp) Davis** was recently accepted into the Duke University Global Policy and Governance Program in Geneva, Switzerland. She will be there this summer completing an internship with the International AIDS Society and also attending their annual conference in Vienna. She got married on October 10, 2009. Her husband will be joining her in Geneva and they have both been studying French in preparation.

**Kim Khauv** (class of 2006) began a non-profit called Well-Balanced World after receiving his graduate degree as a doctor of chiropractic and his master's in public health. The organization's mission is to bring chiropractic to Khauv's compatriots in Cambodia. In December 2009, Khauv led a team of twelve college interns in providing chiropractic care in rural areas of Cambodia. He is grateful to be able to return to Cambodia after leaving the country in 1981 to offer healing to many people who lack access to any type of health care.

**Yasamin Kusunoki** will begin a joint appointment as an Assistant Research Scientist at the University of Michigan's Population Studies Center and the Survey Research Center in the Institute for Social Research beginning this September. A paper from her dissertation titled, "Contraceptive Method Choice among Youth in the United States: The Importance of Relationship Context" has been accepted for publication in *Demography*.

**Kristen Shellenberg** (class of 2005) received the "Gary Stewart Scholarship for Research in Public Health" from the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals in October of 2009. She completed her Ph.D. in Public Health in March 2010 at Hopkins. Her dissertation title is: *Abortion Stigma in the US: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives from Women Seeking an Abortion*. Shellenberg is also expecting a baby in July, which has made the job search a bit difficult.

## Announcements

Jennifer Toller Erausquin welcomed her new baby boy, Liam Miguel at 4:34pm on Tuesday April 27, 2010. He was 8 lbs. 3 oz. and 20.5 inches long. Both mother and baby are home and doing fine.

## Contact Us

We want to hear about how you are doing, where you are working, and “life cycle events” like job changes, promotions, retirements, marriages, and new babies. Please send us a sentence or two (or more if you like). Digital photos are welcome too. We’ll publish them in the next issue of the CHS Alumni Newsletter. Send them to [chsalumni@ph.ucla.edu](mailto:chsalumni@ph.ucla.edu).

## Acknowledgements

This newsletter was written by CHS students Brent Langellier and Vanessa Novoa, produced by Rachel Veerman, and edited by Anne Pebley.

### Consider a Gift to the UCLA Department of Community Health Sciences

No matter how large or small, your support for CHS will make a difference, especially during these tough financial times. All donations to CHS go to a fund for CHS students. The fund is used if current CHS students face financial or other types of emergencies.

To donate, make your check out to: Regents of the University of California. On the memo line, write “For the UCLA Dept. of Community Health Sciences.” Mail your check to: Ms. Diana Springer, UCLA Dept. of CHS, Box 951772, Los Angeles, CA 90095. For questions, contact Ms. Springer at (310) 825-5308. Thanks so much for your support!