



Stony Brook Program in Public Health

Alumni Newsletter
Volume 1, June 2020

Director's Message



Figure 1. Lisa Benz
Scott

The last few months have been the most trying of our lives. I would like to thank our graduates, alumni, faculty, staff and community partners for your tireless contributions in rapid response to the COVID-19 pandemic, with so many of you performing essential work in health and social services, data analytics, public health education and messaging, clinical trials, and also working at home, many of you caring for loved ones and doing your part to flatten the curve. We have persevered through fatigue, sadness, fear, isolation, relocations, quarantines, personal illness, and painful losses.

On May 20th, 2020 we hosted a website page dedicated to a Virtual Graduation for our 15th graduating class, and our largest class to date with 41 newly minted MPH and dual degree professionals joining our alumni community. As part of this event for our graduates, PPH created video messages from members of the faculty to recognize excellence among our students and celebrate their accomplishments. We thank the graduates for their wisdom to invest personal resources into a public health degree. Advanced competencies in public health and healthcare management are essential to serve our communities, the state of New York, the United States, and the world we live in today and tomorrow.

The PPH community is working tirelessly to use our unique and diverse knowledge, skills, and leadership to re-imagine and rebuild every system around us: from how we work, to how we learn, to how we travel, to how we play, to how we heal, and how we help one another, to protect and promote the public's health. We have heard many stories of the exceptional work of our alumni and are proud of the impact and contributions the network of PPH graduates are having to support the COVID-19 "response" with respect to health care, research, community outreach, advocacy for hard hit communities, and policy analyses based on new infections.

As I stated in my remarks to the Class of 2020, I have hope that as a community of public health professionals working together with other industries, that we have the tools and innovations necessary to bring about an end to this pandemic, to learn from the past and build a healthier future. I have hope that together we will achieve better access to health and well-being for all through excellence in education, new vaccination discoveries, improved testing and surveillance methods, and other essential infrastructure. I have hope that with better planning protocols in place we will be ready sooner to respond to emerging threats, and we will have the resources in place so that crises can be prevented and losses minimized to the extent possible.

As society copes with despair and prolonged social distancing, we must remain dedicated to evidence-based interventions to promote mental health, combat depression, distribute food to those in need and minimize waste, protect victims of abuse, reduce drug misuse and addiction, prevent suicide, as well as protect the environment and build healthy community spaces. There is much to do to optimize health, relationships, and well-being for all. The needs for public health improvements are profound. With a trained and competent public health workforce, we can tackle each and every public health challenge with our very best, one by one.

I congratulate this year's Program in Public Health graduates. While we could not be together to celebrate this milestone in person, all students and alumni are encouraged to visit the program's virtual convocation available at <https://bit.ly/3eaHCPm>. Please join me in congratulating our graduates on their achievement by posting a few words of encouragement on our Facebook page available at <https://bit.ly/36lNh2s>.

Our program is continuously looking to improve to meet (exceed) national standards for quality and excellence both public health education (CEPH) and healthcare management and leadership (CAHME) with accreditation site visits scheduled in Fall 2020 (CAHME) and Spring 2021 (CEPH).

Thank you, alumni for the countless ways that you have contributed to the pandemic as part of the research, community outreach and education, and service mission of our program. I miss our community. On behalf of the PPH faculty and staff, we look forward to the opportunity to bring our alumni and our current students together again. Wishing each of you and your loved ones good health.

Sincerely,
Lisa Benz Scott, PhD
Director, Program in Public Health

Congratulations Class of 2020!



Figure 2. PPH Class of 2020 Orientation Photo

Student News & Highlights

Our graduating class has worked tirelessly, not only on completing their studies, but also to assist in many ways to help combat the COVID-19 pandemic response. We have a few highlights to share based on submissions from our students and what we can fit into Newsletter!

- One of our PhD students, **Jamie Romeiser**, is working on a clinical trial focused on a plasma therapy along with her mentor. She is planning to complete her dissertation this summer while also continuing to work on COVID research studies.
- **Sruthi Babu** successfully defended her PhD dissertation on the topic Keratin 17 is a Novel Diagnostic Biomarker for Urothelial Carcinoma on May 22, 2020, and she is starting a residency in Pathology on July 1.
- **Lauryn Bassuk, Alseny Frederick, and Candace Haskell** are volunteering for the Suffolk County Department of Health to provide assistance to people who have recovered from COVID to inform them of a portal where they can get a quarantine release letter.
- **Danielle Russo** works as an EMT and rides on an ambulance as a first responder.

- **Slah Khan** works at an urgent care center and is taking on extra shifts. He is preparing for medical school in the fall.
- **An anonymous MPH student** described their experience as a surgical PA amid cancelled surgeries and staff shortages. They aid on the medical floors and in the ICU to manage COVID patients. This PA said they are fortunate to be a member of this great profession. The outpouring of thanks from the local communities is really overwhelming and so appreciated. “Most of us in the healthcare community don't go around thinking we are ‘essential’ workers or frontline heroes; we just take care of patients because that's what we chose or were called to do.”

Our continuing students have also contributed to the pandemic response.

- **Melissa Minski** developed a facility-based ICD-10-CM coding policy and procedure for Stony Brook University Hospital to ensure data are standardized.
- **Melissa DePaola** is working as a medical social work supervisor at the Suffolk County Department of Health in a New York State funded grant program, the Maternal Infant Community Health Collaborative Program (MICHC), a program that works to assist mothers, infants, and families in an effort to have fewer adverse birth outcomes.
- **Chanel Jones** works for the Stony Brook Hospital Blood Bank, where they are conducting convalescence plasma donations for people who have recovered from COVID-19.
- **Zennur Sekendiz** volunteers at the Charles B. Wang Center to help receive and process donations from the community.
- **Richard Baldev** and **William Holleck** are both Physician Assistants in Cardiothoracic Surgery and Critical care at Stony Brook. They were both deployed to care for patients in COVID ICU's, as well as cardiothoracic surgery patients. Their workload has changed as they are treating some of the sickest of patients.
- **Richard Baldev** recovered from his COVID infection that impacted his entire family but is set to donate plasma to hopefully benefit others who are sick.
- **Jessica Maguire** is the assistant nurse manager in the operating room at Stony Brook Southampton. With the shutdown of elective surgery, she assisted in redeploying the nursing staff to assist with the surge and train the OR and ambulatory nurses to become med-surge nurses.
- As a youth specialist, **Sandi Rubi-Fuentes** works with children in a group home who need care 24/7. “Sometimes it feels uneasy to go to work not knowing if I can potentially be in contact with someone that might had exposure to the virus.”
- At the end of March, like many healthcare workers **Josephine George** was redeployed to the frontline as a nurse Working on a COVID Unit at Stony Brook Medicine, she encountered unique experiences, some gratifying, some disheartening. “In my opinion, through my limited view, Stony Brook Medicine exercised a very well planned and organized approach to combat the chaos. “
- **Yi Wang** works as clinical lab tech in the Immunology Department at Stony Brook Medicine and has recently been assisting the lead technologists with the validating of two Covid-19 antibody tests and assisting with clinical trials of one of the promising Covid-19 treatments.
- **Connor Leszczuk** was hired as a Programmer Analyst for the Help Desk at Stony Brook Medicine only a few days before most employees began working from home in March. He took part in configuring and deploying cameras so staff can safely monitor patients.
- **Aisha Ali** works at Northwell Health as a Research Regulatory Coordinator in the Cancer Institute where the focus shifted to clinical trials related to COVID-19. Many cancer

clinical trials were put on hold so that the research team can focus on COVID-19 clinical trials.

- **Christopher Caravella** is the supervisor of Northwell Health's outpatient Nuclear Medicine department and PET/CT center. He is working every day so that our patients can continue their treatment plans and their fight against cancer.
- **Vanessa Austria-Cange** works for Stony Brook's World Trade Center Research Foundation. She keeps working to provide the medical help that 9/11 first responders need. She spends her weekends at the Office of Emergency Management with the Nassau County Department of Health as an activated Medical Reserve Corps to work the COVID-19 Hotline. She also volunteers with the American Red Cross on calls related to house fires to provide immediate arrangements to families displaced from their homes, a safe place to stay and provide them their basic needs and support during this pandemic.
- **Lara Borg** is a full-time occupational therapist at Stony Brook Medicine. Of the influx of COVID patients in her department, she says "From the very beginning I felt so strongly that we had a role in helping these fragile patients. I continued to push forward and volunteered to take every COVID patient for our department. These patients work so hard to regain strength and endurance and I'm so proud to have a role in that journey."

Faculty & Staff News



Figure 3. PPH Faculty and Honored Guests at 2019 Convocation

During this pandemic, our faculty and staff frequently assist the media and outreach efforts to inform vulnerable populations about COVID prevention, as well as assist with the interpretation of data, forecasting, and developing new research protocols.

PPH team submitted a proposal for a SUNY Stony Brook-Brookhaven National Lab Seed Grant (**Andrew Flescher, Jaymie Meliker, Dylan Smith,**

John Rizzo and Oleg Smirnov from Political Science) on the topic of measurable outcomes associated with social distancing. This seed grant would enable the creation of an academic team at Stony Brook to compile data sets and developing simulations intended to engage in cost benefit and ethical analyses toward policy interventions in times of epidemics and pandemics.

- **Julie Agris** is the Co-Principal Investigator on a grant to study professionalism in healthcare organizations funded by several national associations, including the American Board of Internal Medicine, the American Board of Family Medicine and the Foundation for Medical Excellence. The grant includes collaboration with an interdisciplinary and well-respected team of collaborators in the field of healthcare professionalism from across the country. **Krista Gottlieb** (PPH's Accreditation and Assessment Specialist) is the project's program administrator.
- **Héctor Alcalá and Erica Diminich** (Research Scientist) are serving on an Outreach Working Group for Stony Brook Medicine to select, develop, and translate COVID-prevention messaging for broad population-wide dissemination that is available in both English/Spanish as well as resources for public librarians and their patrons.

- **Lisa Benz Scott** is leading the Stony Brook Medicine Healthy Libraries Program (HeLP) along with PPH faculty, staff, and students, in partnership with the Schools of Social Work, Nursing, and the Health Science Librarians at Stony Brook Medicine, the American Heart Association of Long Island, and the Suffolk County Cooperative Libraries System. She is the Co-Chair of the SBM Community Outreach Working Group along with Dr. Cordia Beverly (and with PPH faculty mentioned above). She is representing PPH on various HSC-wide leadership teams to prepare the PPH for the Fall and to respond to the growing interest in public health courses and PPH content expertise.
- **Sean Clouston** has worked with a researcher in the Department of Computer Science (Andy Schwartz) to successfully apply for a grant from the OVPR to implement a twitter-based tracker and COVID-tracking website for COVID-related mental health outcomes. Here is the early implementation of the website: <http://countycovid.com/>. He also is providing epidemiological results to Stony Brook Medicine Executive Leadership, continuing his work with the WTC to oversee the program's WTC-COVID monitoring program and to create its serological antibody prevalence estimates. He is running an analysis of national COVID incidence data for a scientific paper and interviewed/quoted by Newsday on testing especially in the Latino population. Lastly, Sean is providing timely analyses of COVID new cases by township for the Suffolk County Department of Health and the Office of the County Executive and providing interpretation of policy as “re-opening” our region is carefully monitored to see changes in the reproduction rate.
- **Norman Edelman** on COVID panel hosted by Nancy Goroff. He is treating many COVID patients with the telemedicine pulmonary clinic each day. In addition, he is serving on a BMI panel to review COVID proposals for data use and readiness for IRB review along with **John Rizzo**.
- **Joanie Maniaci** was this year’s recipient of the Director’s Excellence Award for her outstanding contributions to the PPH. We also congratulate her on her new addition. She had a baby boy (Harrison) this spring.
- **Wei Hou**, our biostatistics instructor and research partner, will be joining us as a Core Faculty Member starting in July.
- **Andrew Flescher** won the 2020 Godfrey Excellence in Teaching Award from the College of Arts and Sciences. He generously donated \$1,000 of his prize back to the program, to fund the Ann Tempone Award. In addition, he was recently named the Vice Chair of United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS) starting July 2020 for a three-year term at the end of which he serves as Chair for another three-year term. As part of this service he will represent Stony Brook Medicine on the UNOS’s Policy Oversight Committee.
- **Lauren Hale** is working on topics related to children and sleep health during the Pandemic along with the National Sleep Foundation
- We recruited a new faculty member from the Yale School of Public Health, **Olga Morozova**, to join our faculty on July 1.
- **Jeff Ritter**, content expert in health care management will join the faculty as Associate Director of the Master of Health Administration Program his summer.
- **Amy Hammock** is working on analyzing data from a qualitative study of professionals in higher education examining how Title IX policies are developed and enacted in various university contexts. In light of recent guidance on Title IX released by the Secretary of Education, this research is quite timely, and hope it will provide current research and



Figure 4. Baby Harrison

practice in this area as the new guidance is implemented. She was named Faculty Director of the MSW-MPH dual degree program that was started this past academic year.

- **Amy Hammock** and **Rachel Kidman** are collaborating with a colleague at George Mason University on a study called “Family Relationships in an era of COVID-19,” in which they are distributing a survey via crowdsourcing (<https://tinyurl.com/FRICTIONstudy>) to examine experiences of family violence during social distancing during COVID. In particular, they are interested whether new violence has started during the epidemic, and how family violence might intersect with vulnerabilities during this time, such as unemployment, sickness, and mental health. Feel free to share the survey widely by linking to our PPH Facebook page.
- **Rachel Kidman** is serving on a Clinical Research Committee for Stony Brook Medicine.
- **Jaymie Meliker** was interviewed/quoted by Newsday on the “peak” / “flattening of the curve” and also on recent antibody analyses on a population level. He also was interviewed by Charles Lane of WSHU/NPR for the podcast C19.
- **Catherine Messina** was the recipient of the Class of 2020 Excellence in Teaching Award that is determined by the graduating students and in her role as Practicum Faculty Coordinator, she worked closely with every MPH student to meet the requirements of their practicum despite many organizations closing their doors.
- **John Rizzo** participated on a News 12 panel to discuss the likely economic impact of the crisis (along with Dr. Lawrence Eisenstein and an infectious disease MD who discussed the public health measures to reduce the severity of COVID).
- **Dylan Smith** was recently named the Associate Director of the Master of Public Health Program.

Alumni Spotlight

The PPH professional staff is growing! This year we welcomed an alum Pascale Flis-Aime as the Practicum Placement and Community Engagement Coordinator. Pascale Flis-Aime has earned 3 degrees at Stony Brook University (BS in Health Sciences and Sociology, MPH in Community Health and MBA in Management). Utilizing her own experiences as a graduate from the Program in Public Health, she is eager to help guide MPH and MHA candidates in her role as Practicum Placement and Community Engagement Coordinator. Prior to this, she served as the Community Health Coordinator at the Long Island Health Collaborative - a position that gave her the opportunity to foster relationships with organizations across Long Island. In her role, Pascale will reach out to engage our alumni as practicum preceptors for our current students.

Student Spotlight

This section will highlight a story from a returning PPH student in their own words. This issue’s story comes from Nicole Crawford, a second year MHA student.

“In the fall semester, Dr. Edelman had us do a factsheet and five-minute presentation on a public health topic. After I did my presentation on Public Health Emergencies, he said in our lifetime, we may need to deal with a public health emergency, maybe it would be a new flu epidemic. Well, I was called in, to work on COVID-19, at Suffolk County’s Department of Health Services on Saturday, March 14th, 2020. There were 132,758 global cases of COVID-19, the US had 1,629 cases, and NYS 421 cases. Today, May 14th, 2020, two months later, globally, there are 4,371,611 cases, the US has 1,436,690, NYS has 343,051, and Suffolk County has 41,770. First, I was tasked with calling and checking symptoms on all positive contacts (People that were in contact with COVID-19 positives but may or may not get the virus).

Quickly, I was trained, listening to a public health nurse interview a patient. I was assigned my own patients soon after. Times were different just over two months ago. We had about a dozen forms of paperwork, asking detailed questions, and were told HIPAA could be waived in times of “Public Health Crisis”. It felt unnatural, calling contacts of a positive case, to tell them they were exposed to a certain positive person. The Office for Civil Rights at the US Department of Health and Human Services relaxed and removed penalties for good faith usage of protected health information.

My position has evolved many times in just a few short weeks. Most importantly, I learned a few lessons in leadership. As a supervisor, I have to look after the wellbeing on my team, to take a walk when it is nice out when I think they need fresh air, have them do Tai Chi a few mornings a week, bringing snacks, and keeping them informed by hanging announcements, positive stories, motivation daily quotes, and recent case numbers across the globe. I know my job will evolve again.

I know many people working the “front lines” in hospitals, nursing homes, and in general, healthcare. I work behind the scenes, reporting deaths, educating positive patients on the need to stay home and isolate, for their contacts to quarantine, or ensure our residents are getting supplies like masks, thermometers, PPE, food, or reaching out to resourceful hotlines. We make sure they know protocols, to notify healthcare providers of their positive status if seeking medical attention or put them in touch with nurses for medical advice. It is important so we stop the spread.

I saw something amazing, I asked people on Facebook, ‘If you are ‘essential’ what do you do?’ The ‘awesome kick-butt RN’ thanked the ‘Starbucks Barista’ for fueling her day. I saw people liking each other with a thumbs up or sharing what their family members do. My sister works at a grocery store on the receiving end, making sure the shelves get stocked. My brother works at a nursing home, and on his breaks, tries to help the elderly facetime with their families. Being in PPH as an MHA student, I know I am getting many lifetime credits and exposure in more ways than I would have thought a few years ago. I have more insight from my classmates and professors, and I want to thank them for their ‘essential’ roles and efforts.”

Nicole Crawford, M.S.

Master of Health Administration Candidate

Annual Giving Day



Figure 5. Héctor Alcalá and Maylene Navarra at 2019 APHA

Stony Brook University held its inaugural Annual Giving Day on April 30, 2019. The Program in Public Health had a goal of 50 participants and with your help were able to exceed our goal. We were bolstered by matching gifts by Dr. Benz Scott and Dr. Kenneth Kaushansky, Senior VP for Health Sciences. This funding was used to support our 2019 Ann Tempone Award Winner, Passang Tsekey, and Maylene Navarra to present a poster at last year’s APHA annual meeting in Philadelphia.

The 2020 Annual Giving Day is postponed, however, Dr. Flescher generously contributed

\$1,000 to the Ann Tempone Award fund from his prize as this year’s Godfrey Excellence in Teaching Award from the College of Arts and Sciences.

Share your news

We want to provide you with a newsletter with information that you are interested in hearing. Please share your news with us so that we can include it in our next newsletter or so we can highlight you in the alumni spotlight. You can include your news in this survey to help us guide future newsletters <https://bit.ly/36k9H4e>

Or feel free to send us a message at: publichealth@stonybrookmedicine.edu

Deadline for submission is October 1, 2020 for inclusion in our next issue.