

# The *Publication* Spring 2017

Newsletter of the University of Saskatchewan School of Public Health



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

School of  
Public Health

USASK.CA/SPH

SPH  
10

## Moving forward: SPH turns 10

**The past decade has brought both triumph and tribulation to the School of Public Health. Now, with a new action plan and a birthday celebration in the works, the school is focusing on the future.**



*SPH faculty and staff in the U of S Health Sciences building*

"We're in a good place right now. We've started on a new path of transformation to a specialized school of public health and centre of research excellence," explained Dr. George Mutwiri, who joined the school in 2009 and has served as interim executive director since July 2015. "We're rebuilding our reputation, and we intend to make an impact locally and globally." *(Continued on next page)*

An external review in 2015 and subsequent University of Saskatchewan task force analysis recommended that the school develop specific goals and a refreshed vision and mission to achieve the change it needed. The school decided to combine these revised elements in an action plan, which would guide it in its next steps.

The process of creating the plan re-connected the school's faculty with students, alumni, U of S leaders and community partners when they came together at a consultation session in April 2016. Mutwiri said the response was extremely encouraging.

"I am grateful to those who helped us develop our action plan," he said. "It was heartening to see that so many people are still invested in the school and believe we have an important part to play in serving our local and international public health communities."

In addition to new objectives, the plan has refocused the school's efforts on some original mandates. Rebuilding community relationships, revitalizing research and increasing Indigenous initiatives are top priorities.

The SPH was established as one of three graduate schools at the U of S in 2007, principally to enhance graduate learning at the university, unite diverse health sciences teaching and research under a single interdisciplinary unit, and to provide education and public health solutions via community outreach.

The school's foundational Master of Public Health (MPH) program has been popular from the outset, and is the first public health program outside Europe to be accredited by European body APHEA (Agency for Public Health Education Accreditation).

In 2016, the school diversified the MPH program by introducing an innovative thesis option, which gives students the opportunity to do research and write a thesis concurrent to completing the professional degree.

The school's thesis-based programs in biostatistics, epidemiology, and vaccinology and immunotherapeutics, along with a number of special case doctoral programs, have also created unique research opportunities for students and faculty. Together, these programs have helped the school's student population flourish from 20 to well over 200. To date, close to 400 students have graduated from the SPH.

Turning 10 signifies a new era for the SPH, as it sets its sights on future success. Plans are underway to develop a PhD program in applied public health, and a specialized Indigenous health stream of the MPH program. The school is also planning a celebratory gala event later in the year.

"We are looking forward to bringing people together to mark a decade of achievement," Mutwiri said. "This is an exciting time to be at the school and we look forward to a very bright future."

## Spring 2017 newsletter

**1...Moving forward: SPH turns 10**

**3...Bridging the gap**

**5...Interim Executive Director's message**

**5...SPH backs plain and standardized packaging**

**7...In other news**

**9...French connection**

**10...Student success stories**

### Stay in touch

As part of the SPH community, help us celebrate our achievements!

Do you have news that you would like to share?

**Let us know!**

**Contact**

**[cat.bonner@usask.ca](mailto:cat.bonner@usask.ca)**







## Interim Executive Director's message

It has been an eventful term at the school, and I am delighted to share with you some of the many great achievements of our faculty, students and alumni in this spring edition of the *Publication*.

As you will see from the front page, 2017 marks 10 years of the SPH! This is a significant milestone and we are excited to launch our *SPH 10* campaign, to celebrate the last decade and move us forward to a bright new future. Stay tuned for associated news and events!

As usual, it has been a long winter in Saskatchewan and we are eagerly anticipating the *proper* start of spring. With final exams concluded for the year, we are now looking forward to marking the accomplishments of our graduating students at convocation on June 6. Convocation is a very enjoyable and special occasion where we invite our graduates and their families to join us to unwind and celebrate!

Finally, I would like to wish all the best to our MPH students embarking on summer practicum placements in the coming weeks. I hope you all have enjoyable and valuable experiences working alongside public health professionals.

George Mutwiri, DVM, PhD  
Interim Executive Director

## SPH backs Plain and Standardized Packaging (PSP) campaign

**The SPH has endorsed a national campaign to introduce PSP for tobacco products in Canada.**



**SPH alumnae and PSP campaigners Harsha Kasi Vishwanathan (left) and Lesley James (right) with the Honourable Nicola Roxon, former Australian Minister for Health.**

The campaign will call on the federal government to make good on its pre-electoral promise to adopt PSP as part of new health policies.

Playing a leading role in the campaign, SPH alumnae Lesley James and Harsha Vishwanathan, who are both graduates of the Master of Public Health program working in policy development with the Heart and Stroke Foundation, explained why the time is right for Canada to introduce PSP.

“Every day counts. Delaying only serves the tobacco companies, who entice new customers to get hooked on their products,” said James, who chairs the Canadian Coalition for Action on Tobacco (CCAT), a group of national health organizations tasked with developing the policies that will move PSP from promise to practice.

*(Continued on next page)*

PSP will standardize the look of cigarette and tobacco packaging, removing brand-specific design such as logos, fonts, colours and images, but graphic health warnings will remain.

With other forms of advertising severely restricted, tobacco companies see packaging as valuable marketing space. "It's really a last frontier for them," explained Vishwanathan.

Bright colours, shiny materials and enticing language continue to draw new customers by glamorizing smoking and creating a brand loyalty which makes it difficult for people to quit.

Youth and women are particularly vulnerable to this type of marketing, making positive links between attractive cigarette packaging and lifestyle values such as sophistication and elegance.

Although smoking has declined in Canada, it continues to be the country's leading preventable cause of disease and death.

"Around 18% of Canadians still smoke," James said. "PSP will reduce the appeal of tobacco products, discourage new users and encourage more quit attempts, which will in turn reduce the burden of tobacco-related disease and death in Canada."

But will PSP prove a successful deterrent to smokers? Dr. Yelena Bird, SPH assistant professor and researcher in tobacco control and prevention, thinks so. "Research has shown that the tobacco industry has increasingly relied on marketing the cigarette package to create brand recall and loyalty among current smokers, and a desire to try smoking among young customers," she explained.

Echoing Dr. Bird's view is Jennifer May, vice-president of health promotion for the Lung Association of Saskatchewan, who attended a national consultation on PSP in Ottawa last summer. "It is a critical step in the fight against smoking. The consultation served to remind the government that PSP has been successful in other countries and that it can work for us," May said.

Australia introduced PSP in 2012, and has since reported a 25 per cent decrease in smoking, reduced brand loyalty, and more quit attempts.

But PSP still faces major backlash from tobacco companies who claim it will encourage illegal sales and lower tax revenues.

These are just scare tactics, James clarified. "The tobacco industry is desperate to change the discourse on PSP by putting false evidence out into the public," she said. "Part of CCAT's job is to identify and point out the biased nature of this opposition."

For now, CCAT continues to work with Health Canada and tobacco-control organizations to agree on what PSP will look like in Canada, and to learn from the experiences of countries who have introduced it.

Continuing to grow support for PSP on a provincial and national level will make a great deal of difference, James explained.

"Our campaign has a much higher chance of success if we demonstrate a unified voice."

More information on plain packaging can be found at [www.plainpacks.ca](http://www.plainpacks.ca).

**Stay connected  
with the SPH**

Visit [www.usask.ca/sph](http://www.usask.ca/sph)

**Follow us on social media**



**@usaskSPH**



**/usaskSPH**

# In other news

## Prestigious QEII grant for Dr. Hassan Vatanparast



Congratulations to SPH joint faculty member Hassan Vatanparast, and College of Nursing Professor Pammla Petrucka, who have been awarded a Canadian Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Advanced Scholar grant for their project *Seeking Sustainable Solutions in Food Security and Nutrition for Women and Children: a Tri-Country Approach*.

Vatanparast is co-leading a research team with Petrucka that will receive a total of \$449,200 from the prestigious three-year grant, to be matched by the U of S, which was awarded as a result of collaborative work by the School of Public Health, College of Nursing, College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, and Office of Vice President Research.

The grant will connect scholars from Canadian, Guatemalan and Tanzanian institutions to come together and address food security-related challenges existent in Guatemala and Tanzania specifically for women and children.

Guatemala has the highest rates of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition among Latin American countries, and the third highest in the world.

In Tanzania, mal- and under-nutrition in young expectant mothers is rife, and there are disproportionate levels of disease in rural and remote communities and among minority groups.

Vatanparast explained that each of the three countries will bring a distinct perspective and unique challenges to the project, which, when shared and strategically addressed, will result in more holistic and globalized solutions. The project will also strive to build lasting relationships between the institutions involved.

## SPHSA host grad ball

The SPH Student Association (SPHSA) held a successful grad ball event for SPH students and faculty on March 25 at the Underground Café in Saskatoon.

Fun was had by all at the event, which featured food, a photobooth, dancing and even some 'awards' for faculty and students!

The SPHSA plays a key role in connecting students in all five of the school's programs by organizing social events, developing new initiatives, and facilitating professional development opportunities.



## SPH Prof gives TV interview



SPH Assistant Professor Michael Szafron appeared on Global Saskatoon news on April 20, as part of a segment analyzing marijuana use in light of the federal government's announcement of plans to legalize recreational use of the drug by 2018.

Szafron has garnered attention for his work as part of a team researching potential problematic side effects of marijuana use, and the population groups who could be most at risk from them, one of which is young people.

In the interview, Szafron warned that legalizing the drug could be 'opening up a Pandora's box' for Canadian healthcare systems, and that more research needs to be done to discover the impact marijuana could have on young people long-term.

See Dr. Safron's full interview [here](#).

## Roll up the win

Congratulations to former SPH employee Susan Mason, who was presented with a new 2017 Honda Civic Coupe EX-T courtesy of Tim Horton's!

Susan won the car with a grand prize-winning Roll Up The Rim competition

coffee cup from the Marquis Hall branch of Tim's on the U of S campus.

She used a gift card given to her as a leaving present by SPH colleagues to purchase a beverage which resulted in a free coffee, and subsequently earned her the car-winning cup.

Media and well-wishers gathered in the bowl on April 21 to see Susan claim her prize.



## SPH 10

SPH is launching a special campaign, SPH 10, to mark its 10-year anniversary. You may have noticed the brand new logo on the *Publication's* front page!



The campaign will celebrate a decade of the school's achievement and a bright new future, bringing together new initiatives, events and special news stories over the coming year, leading up to a celebratory gala event in 2018.

The first initiative to launch as part of SPH 10 is brand new faculty research profiles.

With a new one released each month, the profiles are an overview of SPH faculty's research expertise, passions, and past and current projects.

This month's profile is Associate Professor Lalita Bharadwaj, so visit our [SPH 10 website](#) to learn more about her work.

# French Connection

**An ongoing research project with a French university has yielded opportunities for the SPH to foster more partnerships with European research institutions.**

SPH Assistant Professor Alexander Crizzle is the lead researcher on a national study launched in collaboration with the University of Bordeaux, which tracks causes and rates of common injuries such as falls and driving-related injuries in middle-aged Canadians, in conjunction with risk factors and medical conditions.

The partnership has been so successful that Crizzle is now working with the Canadian Embassy of France to establish further collaboration between the U of S and the University of Bordeaux.

The embassy is funding Crizzle's visit to France in June 2017 where he will meet with fellow researchers at the University of Bordeaux, and explore potential for partnerships in other departments and French universities.

Crizzle, whose research specializes in gerontology, mobility and fall prevention, is delighted with the relationships and opportunities the project has cultivated.

"This trip will be a fantastic opportunity to meet with researchers in France and showcase the great work happening at the U of S," he said. "I am hopeful that it will give our research more exposure and encourage many more partnerships between Canadian and European research institutions."

Working with the University of



*Alexander Crizzle (centre) met with Fabien Agenès (left) and Jean-Christophe Auffray (right) from the Canadian Embassy of France to discuss further collaboration between the U of S and the University of Bordeaux in France.*

Bordeaux means that findings from the study can be used to compare injury prevention policies on an international level, and lead to improved programs and services in Canada, particularly for the elderly, Crizzle explained.

The study uses a survey developed at the University of Bordeaux which has tracked injury types and rates in France over the past 25 years, and has been adapted to a Canadian context.

The survey is aimed at people aged 45 and over, and asks a series of questions to determine how everyday health, demographic and lifestyle factors affect injury rates.

One project to stem from the survey is examining the role of common medications including anti-depressants and anti-hypertensives, both singly and in combination with alcohol, in the risk of seniors falling. Developing a plan to compare French and Canadian study data will be a key part of Crizzle's trip to Bordeaux, as health agencies in Europe have different guidelines on alcohol use with medication.

"Making comparisons in injury prevention policy on an international scale will help inform and improve our own provincial and national policies," he said. "This will have a significant impact to help care for our elderly population and address Canadians' everyday needs in this area."

# Student success stories

## Arathi Arun

Second year MPH student Arathi was awarded the University of Saskatchewan Graduate Student Association (GSA) Professional Excellence Award at the GSA Awards Gala on April 1.

The GSA recognized Arathi's passion for improving community health, and her work with the Ministry of Health in Regina, SK, in delving deeper into the process of health policy integration and putting the core competencies of public health into use.

Set to convocate in June, Arathi would like to continue working in health administration as she did during her MPH practicum, specifically in implementing and integrating health policies.

Read the full story of Arathi's award win [here](#).

## Swagata Ghosh

Second year MPH student Swagata and colleagues published a research paper in *Maternal Health, Neonatology and Perinatology* titled [Factors affecting deliveries attended by skilled birth attendants in Bangladesh](#). The paper explores factors associated with deliveries attended by Skilled Birth Attendants (SBAs) in South East Asian country Bangladesh, which is struggling to reduce maternal mortality. The study revealed important factors closely related to deliveries attended by SBAs, and recommended actionable measures to raise the percentage of SBA deliveries, which should ultimately help to reduce the number of maternal deaths in Bangladesh.

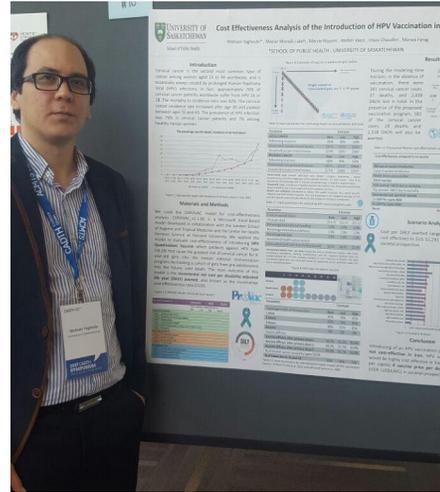
## Ellen Rafferty, Mohsen Yaghoubi and Stephanie McClean

Ellen, Mohsen and Stephanie travelled to Ottawa to present at the 2017 CADTH Symposium, taking place April 23 to 25.

PhD students Ellen and Mohsen presented on costs and saving associated with a pharmacists prescribing for minor ailments in Saskatchewan, and cost effectiveness analysis of the introduction of the HPV vaccination in Iran respectively, projects undertaken with their supervisor SPH Assistant Professor Marwa Farag.

MPH student Stephanie presented a poster on a

collaborative project with her supervisor Assistant Professor Michael Szafron and the Saskatoon Health Region to explore two different methods of screening for jaundice in newborn babies, and the costs and outcomes of each.



**Mohsen Yaghoubi (above) and Stephanie McClean (below) present posters at the 2017 CADTH Symposium in Ottawa.**



*The Publication was written, edited and compiled by Catherine Bonner, Communications Officer for the School of Public Health, University of Saskatchewan.*

*The SPH would like to thank everyone who has shared their stories and successes for publication in this newsletter and our website, [www.usask.ca/sph](http://www.usask.ca/sph).*



**UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN**  
**School of**  
**Public Health**  
**USASK.CA/SPH**