

The *Publication* Summer 2016

Newsletter of the University of Saskatchewan **School of Public Health**



Interim Executive Director's message

On August 18, 2016, it was my pleasure to welcome 30 new Master of Public Health (MPH) students to the SPH at our annual orientation. I was delighted to find that we have a good mix of students from Saskatchewan and other provinces in Canada, and international students as well.

In my address to the students, I emphasized the importance of the role they have to play as the public health professionals of the future. The education, research and training taking place in all five SPH programs gives our graduates the tools they need to go out into the world and make a difference to the lives of people in communities large and small.

'Prevention is better than cure' is more than just a saying in public health - it is a mantra to live by. Working to prevent healthcare issues before they develop is more effective and saves valuable resources. As public health professionals, we have a duty to remember this and make it part of our everyday working lives.

I told the students about my own journey into public health, and how in my early career as a veterinary practitioner in Nairobi, Kenya, I saw the devastating effects that losing livestock to disease had on the local people. I went on to realize the vital role that vaccines play in the prevention of diseases the promotion of public health, and poverty reduction, and I decided to focus my education and research in this area.

I wish all our students very well as they start their fall term classes.

George Mutwiri, DVM, PhD
Interim Executive Director

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Stay in touch

Do you have news or an event that you would like to share with us, or that you would like us to share?

Are you an alumna/us with an interesting success story, or a community health organization interested in collaborating with the SPH?

Let us know!

Contact us:
cat.bonner@usask.ca
Connect with us:
www.usask.ca/sph

Passion for Indigenous health leads Métis student to MPH

Diane Adams has arrived at the School of Public Health (SPH) with a clear goal in her mind: "I would like to work towards solving the problems that Indigenous people face in public health and improve the health, wellbeing and sustainability of the Indigenous communities around us" she said.

Speaking to Adams, her passion for Indigenous health is clear, and she chats enthusiastically about the journey that brought her to the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) to study for a Master of Public Health (MPH) degree. A Métis student, she chose the U of S program for its focus on social and behavioural sciences as a core area of public health, and the opportunity to pursue research in Indigenous water security through the newly-developed MPH thesis stream, under the supervision of SPH associate professor and award-winning researcher Dr. Lalita Bharadwaj.

Growing up in a remote community outside Thunder Bay, ON, Adams was exposed to Indigenous public health from a young age. Several of her family members worked as environmental health inspectors, and the area where she was raised had a strong history of innovation in Indigenous healthcare. "The cross-cultural health model and thinking was ingrained into me really young" she said.

In her early teens, Adams and her family relocated to Sioux Lookout, a small town in northwestern Ontario which connects 29 remote northern communities to essential healthcare services. After graduating high school, Adams worked at the town's hospital. She was struck by the devastating negative health effects on patients from Indigenous communities who did not have access to a clean water supply, and the young in particular. "I saw what should have been young strapping men come in weakened and with nasty skin infections", she said.

For Adams, it was a pivotal moment. "I saw such a need" she said. "It just made me realise that there was a lot of work to be done within Indigenous communities in terms of clean water and environmental health, and that I wanted to help solve these problems".



Diane Adams. MPH student

Adams decided to pursue higher education in public health, but finding a degree program that was a good fit was challenging at first. When she moved to Regina, SK to study environmental health at the First Nations University of Canada (FNUniv), she quickly thrived as a student, and the program fulfilled her desire to apply the health principles she was learning within local Indigenous communities. In 2015, Adams graduated from FNUniv with a B.ASc in Environmental Health and Science with great distinction and a Dean's Medal in engineering and applied science.

A year later, excited for the next step in her journey, Adams enters the MPH program as the 2016-17 recipient of the Government of Saskatchewan's prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Centennial Aboriginal Scholarship, which she was awarded for her proposal to study Indigenous water security from a cultural perspective.

"People in Indigenous communities may not define water security in the same way governments would" Adams said, explaining the high impact of culture on the way individuals and groups of people interpret the world around them. "I would like to explore how Indigenous groups define water security, and what it means to them, as water is highly sacred in Indigenous communities".

Today, Adams believes that community-based participatory research is essential to solving the public health issues still prevalent in Saskatchewan's Indigenous communities, and that the needs of these communities must drive the research of public health experts. "Making tools that are useful and meaningful to Indigenous groups is the only way to move forward" she said. "The research needs to adapt to the needs of the people, and the solutions need to work for them".

Adventure in Asia for PhD student

SPH student Stephanie Ortynsky has been selected to participate in the Aga Khan Foundation of Canada (AKFC) International Youth Fellowship program.

Ortynsky was selected as one of 12 participants to the program, which offers young professionals with high potential in leadership a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to work with host organizations in African and Asian countries and become leaders in international development. She was inspired to apply to the program following her Master of Public Health practicum placement at the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, Switzerland, where she was introduced to the Aga Khan Development Network and the prospect of an international career in public health.

Currently a PhD student in the Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics thesis-based program and working under the supervision of SPH assistant professor Dr. Marwa Farag, Ortynsky will take a year of leave from her studies to participate in the program, which consists of a month-long international development management training seminar in Ottawa, followed by an eight-month overseas placement in Tajikistan, a country in Central Asia.

Ortynsky will be working as a monitoring and evaluation fellow with Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS), an international organization that works within communities in host countries to address continuing development concerns in areas such as health, education and rural development. She explained that the placement will provide a unique chance to gain professional experience to build a career in the healthcare sector in a developing nation.

“What is exciting about this opportunity is that it will provide the chance to have a hands-on international developing country experience” she said, “and an occasion to test and make use of the knowledge that I have acquired up until this point from my formal, travel, and professional education.”

Her work will help the AKHS in its mission to enhance healthcare and increase access to quality services in Tajik communities, and provide a chance to make a positive

impact on the significant health issues facing the nation, whose economy suffered badly with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

With her PhD thesis focussed on international vaccine policymaking process, Ortynsky hopes the connections she makes in Tajikistan will provide the foundation for future work within the country, and a potential site for one of her case studies on international vaccine policy.

“The AKFC's network is vast and being plugged into it can only be of benefit to a young person wanting to make a difference in the world” she said.

As for culture shock, Ortynsky is no stranger to different cultures having completed an internship in South Africa, but she anticipates living in Tajikistan will bring a series a fresh challenges. She acknowledges that living conditions in the country will be much different to those in Canada, and access to technology and transport could be particularly problematic. She added that exposure to a new culture can have a humbling effect on a person, but that the time overseas will provide her with an insightful learning opportunity.



Stephanie Ortynsky, PhD student In Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics



Women of Distinction Award for SPH Professor

SPH associate professor Lalita Bharadwaj has been honoured with the YWCA Saskatoon Women of Distinction Award in the category of Research and Technology for 2016. Dr. Bharadwaj's research plays an important role in informing policy and developing local solutions in providing clean water supplies to First Nations communities, which remains a problematic issue across Canada.

The YWCA Women of Distinction Awards are an annual celebration honouring local women for outstanding contributions to the Saskatoon community. Awards are given in a number of categories including Community Building, Education, Leadership, and Research and Technology, as well as a Lifetime Achievement award. The awards gala took place on Thursday May 26, 2016.

Dr. Lalita Bharadwaj, associate professor

The evening was a great success for the University's female leaders, with seven in total taking home honours.

In other news

Congratulations 2016 Graduates!

Graduates of the School's MPH and thesis-based programs enjoyed their convocation ceremony at TCU Place in downtown Saskatoon on May 31. The School hosted a reception for graduates and their families after the ceremony, where everyone was in high spirits. Joined by interim executive director Dr. George Mutwiri, and SPH faculty and staff, the students had a well-deserved opportunity to revel in their success. We wish all our graduates the very best in whatever they choose to pursue next.



Our 2016 graduates with interim executive director Mutwiri

President Stoicheff visits SPH

The SPH welcomed President Peter Stoicheff for an informal meet and greet on June 7, during which he spoke about his strategic priorities and future vision for the University. Faculty, students and staff had the opportunity to ask some questions of the new President, and enjoy time for informal mingling and refreshments afterwards. President Stoicheff was appointed to his role in October 2015.

Faculty, students enjoy SPHA panel discussion

The Saskatchewan Public Health Association (SPHA) hosted a public panel discussion on the future of public health in the Health Sciences building on June 9. The topic elicited many interesting questions and discussion points from those attending, and was facilitated by Dr. David Jones, a former President of the Canadian Public Health Association, and Dr. Carrie Bourassa, a professor with the First Nations University of Canada. The SPH enjoyed collaborating with the SPHA to provide healthy refreshments for attendees of the event.

For more information on the SPHA and to get involved, please visit www.saskpha.ca

New Foundations: Q and A with Dr. Alexander Crizzle



Dr. Alexander Crizzle is trading Ontario for Saskatchewan to join the School of Public Health (SPH) as an assistant professor. He will be teaching the SPH's inaugural MPH class Foundations of Public Health, and the MPH capstone course Interdisciplinary Public Health Practice. His research interests include gerontology, community mobility and fall prevention, Parkinson's disease and other neurological diseases such as dementia, stroke and epilepsy.

Q: What attracted you to the SPH?

A: The U of S has a great reputation and is the only university in Canada that houses every medical discipline. As the SPH is a young school and given the opportunities for collaboration at U of S, this was a wonderful opportunity to establish my line of research and shape future initiatives within the SPH.

Q: How do you hope to make a difference at the SPH?

A: I hope my research interests and skills will help the SPH grow and expand by attracting top students, securing grant funding and developing/ strengthening community partnerships. If all these occur, then I think I have done a good job to promote the SPH and the U of S.

Q: What will you miss about Ontario? What excites you about Saskatchewan?

A: I will definitely miss my family and friends the most. Otherwise, I will miss the continuous activities and events in Toronto, and all the wonderful restaurants! However, there are always hidden gems in every city. I'm looking forward to touring Saskatoon and the surrounding areas but I must admit, I am slightly nervous about the cold winters!

Q: Do you have any juicy research projects on the go, and could you give an overview of one of them?

A: I'm presently involved in 9 projects, and I would like to consider them all juicy! But to highlight one, I am working on a national Canadian survey project on the impact of health and other determinants of health on injury prevention, in collaboration with researchers in France who are doing the same survey. One example of the data we are collecting is providing the basis for examining if alcohol and medications, both jointly and in combination, are related to fall risk in Canadian seniors.

Q: Why is public health important to you?

A: Public health is a diverse and multi-disciplinary field that can address health issues on many different levels. I am involved in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention and wellness initiatives, which can improve health outcomes across large populations. Personally speaking, as a gerontologist, public health will play an important role in improving the care and service provision for the elderly, essentially preparing the future for current generations.

Upcoming events - save the dates!

College of Medicine Global Health Conference (sponsored by SPH)

Edwards School of Business, U of S campus

October 1, 2016

Indigenous Water Forum (jointly hosted by Safe Water for Health Research Team)

Dakota Dunes Casino

October 27 and 28, 2016

SPH Poster Fair

D Wing Atrium, Health Sciences Building, U of S campus

October 28, 2016

Saskatchewan Epidemiology Association 16th Annual Fall Symposium (sponsored by SPH)

Marquis Hall, U of S campus

November 2 and 3, 2016

SPH seasonal networking event

Gallery D, TCU Place, downtown Saskatoon

December 2, 2016

Further details in our calendar at www.usask.ca/sph

Student success stories

With warmer weather came news of success for these SPH students.

Nafisa Absher

Nafisa, who is going in to her second year as a Master of Public Health (MPH) student, has been elected to the position of Vice-President, Operations and Communication, in the annual elections for the Graduate Student Association (GSA) executive. Nafisa was very grateful for the support of her SPH colleagues during the election, and she plans to bring many positive changes in the graduate student community, encouraging students to become more engaged with the GSA, creating inclusive and safe spaces in the GSA commons, and connecting graduate students to a greater number of well-being services, to name a few.

Ellen Rafferty

PhD student Ellen was invited to participate in the CIHR Research Poster presentation as part of the Canadian Student Health Research Forum held this June in Winnipeg. Ellen, a student in the School's Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics thesis-based program, was nominated to take part in the forum as one of the top five per cent of doctoral students in health science disciplines at the University of Saskatchewan, and she was also selected to receive a CIHR travel award. The Canadian Student Health Research Forum is a valuable opportunity for health research trainees at the PhD level from across Canada to present their work and be recognized for the excellence of their contributions.

Masud Rana and Shermila Kulanayaka

Finally, two SPH students in thesis-based programs were selected as recipients of a 2016 Saskatchewan Innovation and Opportunity Scholarship through the U of S College of Graduate Studies and Research. Masud Rana, an incoming PhD student to the Collaborative Program in Biostatistics, and Shermila Kulanayaka, a PhD student in the Vaccinology and Immunotherapeutics program, each received awards of \$20,000. The scholarships are available through a special program where the Government of Saskatchewan matches donations to scholarships for Saskatchewan post-secondary students. The scholarships are awarded based on excellence in research and academic performance.

Congratulations to our students on their success!



Nafisa Absher, second year MPH student



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The SPH newsletter was written and compiled by Catherine Bonner, Executive Assistant/ Communications, School of Public Health, University of Saskatchewan.

The SPH would like to thank the faculty, students and alumni who have shared their stories and successes for publication in the newsletter and our website,

www.usask.ca/sph