THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY OF JERUSALEM

Hebrew University - Hadassah
Braun School of Public Health
& Community Medicine

International MPH Alumni Newsletter

WINTER 2021

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MOSHAL SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Message from Prof. Yehuda Neumark,

Director, Braun School

Israel is proud to be leading the world in vaccinating its population against COVID-19, and at the same time, the incidence, R, % of tests positive, and the numbers of serious cases refuse to go down, although we have been in our 3rd national lockdown for two weeks already.

Till now, I have, for the most part, been silent about the epidemic and the way it has been handled in our country, and I certainly have no great insights to share that haven't been said before. And yet… As in most countries, decisions are made by politicians with political agendas, whose understanding of, and respect for epidemiology is limited at best. Last month the Israeli Parliament disbanded and in mid-March we will have a 4th opportunity in less than two years (!) to exercise our democratic right to elect a prime minister. Regardless of wins the election, he (so far I have not heard of any female candidates) will be challenged, to say the least, to form a functioning and stable government. Part of that is because we are truly a divided nation on many political-national-religious-social issues, but mostly it is small-minded politics (and small-minded politicians whose personal agenda takes precedence over the country's wellbeing) that has brought us to the lockdown and to the elections. We set firm benchmarks to gradually and safely exit from the previous lockdown just three months ago and experts designed a national control strategy based on closely monitoring trends, identifying hot spots and intervening swiftly in those specific communities. That was to have prevented us from getting to the very place we are in now. We did quite well on the monitoring and identifying, but sectorial agendas and pressure from small but vocal groups, precluded any serious implementation of the strategy. We know which sectors of Israeli society are driving the epidemic, yet, we refrain from interceding because our prime minister has been indicted on charges of bribery, fraud and breach of trust and needs his coalition partners to help keep him in power and out of jail.

Many of you have heard me refer to public health as a balance between individual freedoms and public safety and wellbeing. Every democratic country enacts laws to protect its citizenry from harm while guarantying personal liberties. Here in Israel, lockdown regulations prohibit outdoor gatherings of more than 10 people, yet allow political demonstrations to take place with no limit on the number of protestors. Individuals must remain within a 1000 meters from their home, but this limit does not apply if one is engaged in physical activity (such as walking, running or cycling). A delicate, and often politically motivated balance.

People caught breaking the lockdown rules can be fined up to 5000 shekels. Until recently, I and many public health colleagues objected to levying fines against people for not wearing a mask in public places or for being outside of their home without a legally valid

reason. We argued that if we engage in information campaigns and coherently and convincingly explain to the public the importance of masking and social distancing, people will listen and behave in accordance with the law to safeguard their own health and that of those around them. Lately I have lost faith in what I now believe is a naïve approach. True, we have done a dismal job of getting

the message across in a consistent and coherent fashion, but when a 30 year-old university-educated COVID-19 positive woman knowingly invites tens of people to her home for a party (with no masks of course) as happened this past weekend in Jerusalem, when tens of thousands of people attend a funeral of a spiritual leader as happened twice yesterday, when senior police officers hold a party for a colleague's birthday as happened last week, and when weddings are attended by hundreds of guests in direct defiance of the lockdown laws as happens nearly every day, I do not believe that these people are not aware of the dangers of COVID-19 infection. With over 650,000 cases (about 7% of the country's population) and nearly 5,000 deaths to date, it is hard for me to give people the benefit of the doubt anymore.

I certainly do not want to become a country that violates human rights in order to maintain public health, and I do want to continue getting health promotion messages out to the public in the naïve hope that it will do some good (which is why we produced this short clip to promote mask-wearing among university students with the message «masks are freedom», and why I am currently working on translating the below poster into Hebrew and Arabic), but at the same time I think that people who flagrantly and knowingly endanger the lives of others by their irresponsible behavior, should be brought to task more severely than they have till now. But that won't happen, because it's election campaign season and no politician wants to alienate potential voters, which is also why the lockdown is being only partially enforced at best. And on it goes. See you at the next lockdown or the next elections, whichever comes first!

Yehuda
Stay Safe & Stay Sane!

Message from Prof. Ronit Calderon-Margalit

Director of the IMPH Program

Dear all,

The past year was a very unusual year for all people. The IMPH program was no exception. We started the school year of 2020/21 with distance learning with our new cohort still in their home countries. Then students started arriving to Israel and being quarantined (at a nice hotel, and still) and moving to distance learning in dorms. We managed to have a brief taste of in person learning when the lockdown came and we moved back to zoom teaching.

Luckily, we were able to vaccinate the whole cohort, and we are looking forward to resume in-person teaching as well as trips and events around Israel.

We are looking forward to resume our COVID-19 webinars to include all of you in the increasing knowledge of this ever-surprising pandemic. Hope you will join us.

We hope to broaden our alumni-based research network. Your ideas and proposals are more than welcome.

Lastly, I wish you all a safe and happy 2021, and hope to see you in person, perhaps at the IMPH 50th anniversary celebrations.

Take care,

Ronit Calderon-Margalit

Message from Dr. Maureen Malowany

IMPH Alumni Academic Coordinator

Dear Alumni,

We welcome our most recent cohort from 2020 to our IMPH Alumni family. Many were caught in the midst of flight cancellations, airport closures, travel restrictions but all eventually did return home! We are very grateful to MASHAV for their support in Israel and globally.

Our Pears Foundation alumni support continues through this academic year for Seed Grant proposals and professional development support. We realise many of you are 'home bound' as you work in the COVID-19 response front lines and research projects or international conference participation seem remote. Keep both in mind as, with vaccines, we move towards a post-COVID-19 world. Please note that some alumni have lost their jobs this past year due to government and donor funding cuts or redirection. Their 'job search' information has been posted in the relevant WhatsApp groups. Let's think about how to help each other through this period – to stay actively and productively employed.

We have decided to restart our Braun School/MASHAV Sunday webinars in February. The first three will be on the subject of vaccines – details to come. If you haven't joined your regional WhatsApp group, please do so. This platform facilitates speedy information sharing!! Topics for later webinars have not yet been decided but we will have a very special session or day honouring the late Professor Adetokumbo Oluwole Lucas (1931-2020), a Public Health pioneer whose work and support kept sub-Saharan Africa's scientific research, public health training and practice at the forefront of the international world. In addition, we are planning to feature YOUR research over these next months and will be in touch for 'volunteers'!!

Speaking of communication, we welcome Hanna Sloutski as our new IMPH Alumni Communications Coordinator. Thank you to all who have posted a welcome to her. This newsletter is produced by Hanna and we thank her!

Admissions registration is open until 1 May 2021. Hebrew University is actively recruiting international students, both scholarship and non-scholarship, to all international programs. We will post information for an upcoming Virtual Open Day closer to the date of 21 March 2021. Spread the word!

We wish you all a healthy 2021. Keep us apprised of your work in the field – your research interests – your public health advocacy.

Warm regards,
Maureen
IMPH Alumni Academic Coordinator

Dear Alumni,

I would like to take this opportunity of introducing myself as the new Alumni Communications Coordinator. It has been almost a month since I joined the IMPH team during these times when Israel had to go into another Covid lockdown.

We have had a busy time here at the Braun School, closing the Fall semester almost exclusively remotely. IMPH program has over 900 talented alumni, majority of which I am still to meet on WhatsApp, via emails or our Facebook page. Hopefully, I will have pleasure of meeting this year's graduating students in person sooner rather than later.

We would love to maintain and improve communication with our senior and recent alumni especially during these times of social distancing. We are very much interested to know about your career, research and personal life. We would also be very happy to know how your classmates and colleagues are doing!

You are invited to submit your news by filling out the form, contacting me via the email: hanas@savion.huji.ac.il, or sharing it with your colleagues on our WhatsApp groups.

Remember that life at HebrewU does not end when you graduate; it continues, grows and thrives.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Ms. Hanna Sloutski,
IMPH Alumni Communications Coordinator

IMPH Marriage and Ph.D. Proposal

Meet Dr. Obsie Baissa (Ethiopia| IMPH '17)
and Mr. Nyasha Makarye (Zibabwe| IMPH '17)

Studying International Masters in Public Health (IMPH) in Israel was a life-changing experience for us. Perhaps serendipitous but attending IMPH not only gave us the academic skills and tools but also where we set foot on our shared journey as a couple. Testimony to Prof. Neumark famous quote, the culturally rich IMPH environment is an opportunity to exchange clinical and academic experiences and, once in a while, students meet their soulmates.

Obsie: *"My journey as an IMPH student, in Jerusalem, was indeed nothing short of a blessing. The program emboldened me to step out of my comfort zone and practice medicine and public health in rural Ethiopia. After graduation, I took a post as a clinician and Head of Department at Haramaya University in Eastern Ethiopia. The same opportunity gave me a platform to train medical students the importance of the public health approach and evidence based practice".*

Nyasha: *"As the saying goes: you can't visit Jerusalem and leave unchanged. For me, the skills I attained during my IMPH training pushed me to think about mass service provision especially for professions which are rare in Africa. Resultantly when I went back to Zimbabwe, I started an audiology clinic catering for the whole Southern region of the country. To expand our reach to remote places we conducted monthly outreach programs. I believe without the training I obtained I wouldn't have managed to reach and help some of the disadvantaged people I ended up meeting".*

Balancing our career and our relationship was so important. We both are super grateful and ecstatic to learn that we both have been invited to pursue a PhD here at the Braun School. We are still early in our Ph.D. journey and we are looking forward to taking milestones and the challenges ahead together.

IMPH Teachers

Meet Dr. Gabriella Lawrence (USA | IMPH '10)

Just over 2 years ago, I walked into my daughter's 5th grade classroom on "career day" determined to achieve a single goal – to ensure that a small group of Israeli 10-year-olds grew up recognizing the word "epidemiology". I put up that slide we all saw on our first day of Prof. Yehuda Neumark's Principles and Uses of Epidemiology class with the Greek origins of the word: epi, meaning "on or upon"; demos, "people"; and logos, "the study of". After playing a suspenseful game investigated the cholera outbreak of 1854, and applauding the contributions of John Snow to our field, I made sure to once again flash "Epidemiology" in huge letters across the board, just to make sure those kids wouldn't forget the word.

Since I graduated from the IMPH in 2010 (an experience I will cherish forever), and started my doctoral research in 2011, I was surprised to discover how often I needed to explain to family and friends what I did as an epidemiologist. My kids stared blankly when the kindergarten teacher asked them what their mom did for a living, and I wondered if there would ever be a day when I would meet someone as excited as I was by the "life course determinants of immune response in young adulthood" (my dissertation ☺).

In a sad turn of events, today, as the entire world finds itself somewhat united in the unprecedented fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, epidemiology is now a common household word. While our field is now recognized amid the over

two million deaths and nearly 100 million cases, I now feel despair when I tell people I am an epidemiologist and they no longer need to ask what that means.

But the pain we all feel today does not take away from what we contribute, so I thought I'd take a moment to share a bit about the work I've done over the last 10 years.

> ***the teaching truly brought me the most joy. Interacting and sharing knowledge with brilliant students from around the world, all hoping to contribute to global public health, was absolutely thrilling.***

During my doctoral research, studying the developmental origins of cytomegalovirus and its potential role in the association between early-life and cardiometabolic risk, I took the opportunity to teach the Survey and Research Methods exercise and Interpretations of Epidemiological Data courses for six years to IMPH students from over 40 countries. I loved the hands-on experiences afforded me in my doctoral research - doing field work, writing

protocols, analyzing data and publishing manuscripts. I was so excited to finally put my studies into practice. "But the teaching truly brought me the most joy. Interacting and sharing knowledge with brilliant students from around the world, all hoping to contribute to global public health, was absolutely thrilling."

In 2017, I joined the Clalit Research Institute as a senior epidemiologist. I was ecstatic to join a team that transformed epidemiological research into impactful clinical tools. I helped build models that identified which patients were at highest risk for developing diabetes and chronic kidney disease, with accompanying platforms to encourage these patients to make changes in modifiable risk factors. I led a team that put together a predictive model for post-partum depression, and I studied the impact of the high stress of rocket attacks during pregnancy on the development of neuropsychiatric disorders in childhood. I helped develop tools to decrease no-show rates in ambulatory clinics, predict preterm delivery, and study the impact of controlling positive celiac serology on long-term health outcomes. I loved seeing my work as an epidemiologist impact patient care and clinical outcomes.

Despite the ground-breaking work I was doing, I jumped at the opportunity to come back to Hebrew University as the Deputy Director of the Israel National Program for Quality Indicators in Community Healthcare. The program is crucial, as it provides policy makers and consumers with aggregate information on the quality of community healthcare in Israel, in order to monitor and improve the medical care system. I was delighted to once again have the opportunity to teach the IMPH students. As I continue to develop my career outside of Hebrew University (I start as Medical Director of Anthem Innovation next month), I will truly miss those who have become like family at Hadassah-Hebrew U, and I know nothing will replace the immense pride I feel when I see my students get up on stage to receive their MPH diplomas.

Would love to hear from all you - my former classmates, students and alumni – as you reflect on your incredible contributions and hopes for the future of public health.

Gabriella

Highlighting Alumnus - Dr. Alexis Nizigiyimana (Burundi | IMPH '19)

IMPH ALUMNI PROFILE

Dr. Alexis Nizigiyimana (IMPH, 2018/2019) was born in Mugamba Commune (pop. 110,000) - an under-developed, poverty-stricken rural community of Burundi. Burundi has among the highest maternal and childhood mortality rates in the world, with 6 of every 100 children dying before their 5th birthday and 5 of every 1000 women dying due to pregnancy and birth related complications.

Until recently, no health care services were available within a 60 km distance of Mugamba!

His experience and struggles of growing up in Mugamba inspired Alexis to study medicine. After receiving his MD degree from the University of Burundi, Alexis founded Youth in Clear Medical - a community-based NGO for vulnerable youth with HIV, and served as director of the New Hope Clinic of Vulnerable Youth. He also co-founded the Burundi Heart Foundation for cardiovascular disease prevention and management. In 2017, Alexis participated in the Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA. This experience inspired him to establish the English Medical Center - a community-based organization focusing on youth and women empowerment through vocational skills. He also launched the Burundi Medical Journal.

A year later, Alexis joined the IMPH program being awarded a Pears Foundation scholarship. As for so many of our alumni, the IMPH experience was life-changing for Alexis. As he recently told us: ***"Being especially inspired by the TEREM clinic and COPC model in Jerusalem, I decided to initiate a health project to address health disparities in rural areas".*** So, immediately upon completing his studies and returning home, Alexis founded the Ubuntu-Village of Life - whose vision is to support disadvantaged people living in rural areas with a particular emphasis on returnees, displaced persons, widows, orphans, and disabled children [http://ubuntuvillageoflife.org].

In Alexis's words: ***"We pledge to provide education, shelter and health care services to those who need it. We are also committed to teaching sustainable economic development backed by innovation and modern practices in our main areas of concern: health; agriculture; nutrition and environmental***

Inauguration of the Ubuntu Village of Life primary health clinic in Mugamba, Burundi. IMPH graduate Dr. Alexis Nizigiyimana, in the beige jacket, founder of Ubuntu and the clinic.

issues. To fulfill this vision, we will utilize the Israeli innovation in agriculture, health, education, and technology. We are committed to bringing about change in Africa". Through his NGO, and with money that saved over the past few years, Alexis just opened the first-ever community medical clinic in Mugamba. The clinic, housed temporarily in a house which Alexis rented, is equipped with a lab, an ultrasound, ophthalmology testing equipment and a pharmacy, and is staffed with health care providers to provide healthcare services to the 2 million residents of Mugamba and six surrounding communes. Ubuntu-Village of Life will operate a referral maternal and child health polyclinic, a demonstration center for maternal, prenatal and child nutrition for first 1000 days, and a fruit-production program. The inauguration ceremony, held on Nov. 14, 2020, was attended by nearly all the residents of Mugamba, the Governor of Bururi province and government representatives, the USAID Burundi country director, and other dignitaries. A video about the clinic and the inauguration ceremony can be seen here. Ubuntu Medical Clinic (UMC) held the first annual Public Open Day to celebrate Christmas with the local community on Dec. 26, 2020 to discuss the medical needs for 2021 with the local community members, medical professionals and lay leaders.

He did this all while writing Burundi's national COVID-19 preparedness and response plan!

Alexis was awarded a scholarship from the Center for Research in Public Health (CReSP) in Canada to undertake a PhD at Université de Montréal. Alexis and his wife, Yolaine, currently live in Montreal for the next stage of his professional career development. See the attached manuscript submitted for publication, co-authored with his supervisor, Thomas Poder, PhD: https://sciforum.net/paper/view/conference/9106

IMPH HUJI's Outstanding Teachers for 2020

The Braun School's of Public Health and Community Medicine teachers is on the list of Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Outstanding Teachers for 2020

The list of Hebrew University of Jerusalem's Outstanding Teachers for 2020 was published, and the Braun School of Public Health and Community Medicine is extremely proud of our four lecturers who appear on the list - Prof. Yehuda Neumark, Prof. Amnon Lahad, Dr. Sasha Kiderman, Dr. Hagit Hochner, and Dr. Shai Carmi! Well done!

Submit Your News

Alumni of the IMPH Program,

We want to celebrate your successes. Most stories will be shared on the International Master of Public Health website, newsletter, social media and other outlets with links allowing you to share the news as well.
Please use the following form to submit your news:
https://forms.gle/WGwwR4uUYH5HizPv5

JOIN OUR VIRTUAL OPEN DAY

We welcome you to share the word about the upcoming Virtual Information Session for the IMPH program. Let your friends and colleagues discover first hand how the Hebrew University combines academic excellence with a rich student life.

March 21st Sign Up here

Congratulations new graduates of IMPH Cohort 2019/2020 on all of your extraordinary accomplishments and welcome to the IMPH Alumni family!

As alumni, your lifelong relationship with HebrewU is just beginning!

Dear Alumni,

Be among inspiring people and help us spread the word among your friends and colleagues.

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