Outstanding Global Health Mentor Awards 2020

Global Health Mentoring Program

Global Health Center
INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AT WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Dear Colleagues,

The inaugural meeting of the Global Health Mentoring Program was January 30, 2020. Since then, the program has successfully expanded networks and increased opportunities to learn about global health.

The program’s mentors and mentees are assigned mentoring groups and meet every six weeks to discuss specific topics, such as career search strategies, individual development and more. The program quickly adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic and in so doing, helped strengthen the mentorship bonds between the participants.

Today, we are pleased to announce the Outstanding Global Health Mentor Awards for 2020. The nominees featured in this booklet have been nominated by both mentors and mentees to recognize outstanding mentorship. As Oprah Winfrey once said, “A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself.” We are grateful for the contributions of all program members.

Kind regards,

Victor G. Dávila-Román, MD, FACC, FASE
Associate Director, Global Health Center
Institute for Public Health
Professor of Medicine, Anesthesiology, and Radiology

Jacaranda van Rheenen, PhD
Manager, Global Health Center
Institute for Public Health

Jeanie Bryant, BSEd, BSAg
Coordinator, Global Health Center
Institute for Public Health

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Ziyad Al-Aly, MD
Assistant Professor, School of Medicine

Dr. Al-Aly is the Director of the Clinical Epidemiology Center, and the Chief of Research and Education Service at Veterans Affairs St. Louis Health Care System. Dr. Al-Aly developed significant expertise leveraging the power of big data and advances in statistical methodologies to fill important knowledge gaps that may not be easily answered by other means of scientific inquiry. For example, he led the work which described a link between air pollution and kidney disease and separately described the global and national burden of diabetes attributable to air pollution. Evidence generated from these studies is widely cited and is contributing to the national and global discussion on the effect of environmental pollution on the burden of non-communicable diseases.

Nominators describe Dr. Al-Aly as one of the most positive people they have ever met with his infectious smile, great advice, and ever-optimistic motivation. He is a high-achieving individual who continually learns from the mentees. In addition, he contributes lessons about life and work attitudes. Dr. Al-Aly is the ultimate optimist, dedicated to helping his mentees grow by investing the time to help them navigate their career paths.

Gaya Amarasinghe, PhD
Professor of Pathology and Immunology, School of Medicine

Dr. Amarasinghe studies host-pathogen interactions. Many pathogens studied in his lab use biochemical and structural methods that have a high impact on the health systems in Africa and Asia. Through collaborative studies, he is also able to evaluate the impact in model systems, and when possible, use data to develop countermeasures. His lab uses a multidisciplinary research program that spans length and time scales to address this question by characterizing the molecular mechanisms of initial interactions at the host-pathogen interface. Using this information, the lab expects to develop a framework to manipulate viruses by modulating virulence (less virulent) in order to gain insight into immune mechanisms that are at play during these critical time points.

Nominators were grateful for Dr. Amarasinghe’s enthusiasm for his work and his passion for sharing it with others. He frames his advice in a relatable way and is also extremely approachable when it comes to asking questions. In addition, Dr. Amarasinghe is very engaging and interested in mentee professional development. Though incredibly busy, he consistently sets aside time to meet with his group and with individual members for mentee-specific guidance, such as providing examples from
his own career, as well as reviewing resumes and faculty research plans. His mentorship is not only useful but goes well beyond what is expected in this mentorship program.

**Jacco Boon, PhD**  
Associate Professor of Medicine, Molecular Microbiology, Pathology & Immunology, School of Medicine

Dr. Boon studies the interaction between the infected host and influenza virus with the aim to identify viral or host proteins that can be inhibited by existing and future antiviral drugs. Development of these drugs will reduce influenza illness and associated morbidities and mortalities. In addition his lab is interested in emerging tick-borne viruses, such as Bourbon virus. His lab recently generated a molecular clone of the virus and developed an animal model to study cell and tissue tropism as well as evaluate potential anti-viral therapies against this emerging deadly disease.

Nominators describe Dr. Boon as a good leader who teaches by example. He makes suggestions on how the group meetings can effectively help everyone. He listens to every mentee’s opinion and make suggestions on how to improve. Dr. Boon not only shows an interest in the development of the mentees’ research life but also considers their welfare. Even with his immense knowledge, Dr. Boon is nonjudgmental and values diversity in perspectives. He continually shares a plethora of knowledge with the group regarding Global Health in addition to offering personal experiences. Dr. Boon is a superb mentor who is very committed to helping his mentees grow professionally as well as personally. He is generous with his time and insights.

**Patty Cavazos-Rehg, PhD**  
Professor, Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine

As a clinician-scientist, Dr. Cavazos-Rehg has worked to disentangle the pathways of complex adolescent health risk problems. She focuses her research on examining the effects of state-level penalties and anti-tobacco/drug media campaigns on youth substance use behaviors and attitudes. In recent years, Dr. Cavazos-Rehg has led large-scale studies to delineate predictors of youth substance use involvement while accounting for today’s new media-saturated environment.

Nominators describe Dr. Cavazos-Rehg’s outstanding listening and engagement skills during the mentoring sessions. As a renowned scholar in her areas of expertise, she offers excellent guidance that matches the needs of mentees. Mentees leave group sessions with big picture ideas such as considering the trajectory of scientific questions, finding sustainable interests, and weighing the tradeoffs entailed in commitment to an academic career.
**Dave Daversa, PhD**  
Postdoctoral Researcher, National Great Rivers Research and Education Center

Dr. Daversa is a postdoctoral researcher at the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, a small institute conveniently situated on the banks of the Mississippi River, at its confluence with the Missouri River, in Alton, Illinois. His research studies individual movement to understand spatial patterns of disease. As the world changes and organisms adjust their movements accordingly, Dr. Daversa is developing tools to predict the epidemiological consequences of those changes. Broadly he is interested in how individual movements shape species interactions, in particular those between parasites and their hosts. Dr. Daversa has studied this topic extensively in amphibians threatened by a pathogen known as the amphibian chytrid fungus.

Nominators mentioned how Dr. Daversa facilitates an outstanding level of engagement in the mentoring sessions, even though the mentees are from different academic or clinical backgrounds. He structures conversations so that everyone is discussing experiences they all have in common, such as managing time in schedules that have been disrupted by COVID-19. Dr. Daversa is very diligent about reframing conversations to include career goals and listening to the journeys of all mentees within the academic environment. The experience and wisdom generated in Dr. Daversa’s mentoring group complements the day-to-day experiences of the mentees.

**Matthew Kuhlmann, MD, MSCI**  
Assistant Professor, School of Medicine

Dr. Kuhlmann’s research interest lies in childhood diarrhea, which accounts for significant global morbidity and mortality while also afflicting adults in endemic regions and travelers to low and middle income countries. Dr. Kuhlmann’s lab studies the complex interplay between the host, pathogen, and environment in an effort to better understand targets for effective vaccine strategies. Understanding who is at risk for severe complications forms a cornerstone in building better prevention strategies for vaccine development.

Those who nominated Dr. Kuhlmann describe him as being the glue of the mentor group. He genuinely takes an interest in the mentees’ current and future plans, and regularly makes an effort to be available to meet, despite his busy schedule. Dr. Kuhlmann’s expertise in various areas and willingness to share his knowledge has helped the mentees understand more about Global Health and how to navigate such a journey and its challenges. Conversations with Dr. Kuhlmann are engaging because he sheds light on different concerns, adding to ideas, and bringing perspectives that may have been failed to be considered. Dr. Kuhlmann is an excellent mentor who is very committed to his mentees and demonstrates a strong interest in their careers and personal development.
Jason G. Newland, MD, MEd
Professor, Pediatrics, School of Medicine; Medical Director, Antimicrobial Stewardship Program, St. Louis Children’s Hospital

Dr. Newland focuses on the appropriate use of antimicrobials in all settings, including both human and animal health. His primary research focus has been in the dissemination and implementation of Antimicrobial Stewardship Programs for hospitalized children. He is found and leader of the Sharing Antimicrobial Reports for Pediatric Stewardship (SHARPS) national collaborative of over 50 children’s hospitals across the United States. Additionally, Dr. Newland is involved with implementing strategies to improve antibiotic use in ambulatory settings. His advocacy work has been in promoting appropriate antibiotic use in the agriculture industry.

Nominators applaud Dr. Newland for the great job that he does of supporting his mentees, answering questions, and just being extremely approachable. He is readily available for advising and provides reference materials in his field of expertise.

Carolyn Sargent, MA, PhD
Professor, Department of Anthropology Arts & Sciences

As a medical anthropologist, Dr. Sargent is primarily interested in maternal and child health. Her research has focused on reproductive health care decisions, parental investment in child health and health disparities, particularly those affecting transnational immigrants. She is also interested in transformations in local health systems in rural and urban Africa. Her fieldwork sites include Republic of Benin and Mali, West Africa, Jamaica, and France. Her advocacy efforts include working with immigrant aide associations and public hospitals in France to enhance clinical communication and facilitate immigrant women’s access to maternity and oncology services.

Nominators describe Dr. Sargent as a very committed mentor who always takes the time for her mentees. Her background in anthropology brings an insightful angle to Global Health. Interactions with Dr. Sargent are enjoyable because they provide a better understanding of cultural perceptions. In addition to these qualities, Dr. Sargent is a kind and generous person who has a great sense of humor.
Jacaranda van Rheenen, PhD  
Manager, Global Health Center, Institute for Public Health

Dr. van Rheenen is the manager of the Global Health Center. She is interested in improving community and global health through the creation of new knowledge and the application and translation of science. In addition, she shapes the center’s mission to improve global health through transdisciplinary programs and partnerships across Washington University and around the world. A native of the Netherlands, she earned a master’s of science degree in agricultural and environmental sciences at Wageningen University in Wageningen, the Netherlands, in 1996, and a doctorate in plant ecology from Utrecht University in the Netherlands in 2005. Her research has taken her to the Bolivian Amazon rainforest to study the role of seed trees and seedling regeneration for species maintenance in logged-over forests.

Nominators shared of Dr. van Rheenen’s calm confidence, which is motivating to those who question themselves and their abilities. She draws on her own experiences in the group sessions, while making sure that each mentee shares as well. Though Dr. van Rheenen was not an “official” mentor for this program, one mentee described the amazing job she did coordinating the Institute for Public Health Summer Research Program – Public and Global Health Track. She is an inspirational mentor, resourceful, empathetic, and always seeking to understand the mentees issues, struggles, and aspirations. She walks mentees through the difficult times and encourages exploration. She is always there to help, always. Throughout all interactions with her, she is always there to guide and support mentees with her smile, friendliness, and positivity. Dr. van Rheenen is a wonderful human being.

Leyao Wang, PhD, MPH  
Instructor, School of Medicine

Dr. Wang studies asthma origins and etiology. She has been leading a collaborative birth cohort in Puerto Rico after the devastating Hurricane Maria in September 2017. This cohort focuses on infants who were exposed in utero to the hurricane and aim to evaluate the impact of specific prenatal exposures on the infant gut microbial community. The hypothesis is that the infant gut microbiome is the major mechanism underlying the association between prenatal adverse exposures and increased disease risks, such as asthma. In addition, Wang lab has applied multiple genome and airway microbiome analysis methods into population-based asthma studies to understand the genetic and bacterial architecture of asthma endotypes.

Those who nominated Dr. Wang describe her has being incredibly supportive of the mentees in her group. She genuinely loves to help young people start their careers and build up from there. She offers personalized help to each mentee throughout the year. In addition, she connects students to
other individuals and is very supportive in helping mentees find jobs and opportunities. Dr. Wang keeps the scheduled meetings on time, provides guidance and is very open to discussions and feedback. She is a natural mentor and a great listener who gives tailored feedback to the needs of each mentee. She is so willing to go out of her way to make a participant feel welcome in a group of strangers. Since this program started, Dr. Wang is heavily invested in the professional growth and development of her group. During this pandemic when graduating mentees have been struggling with the job market, Dr. Wang has gone above and beyond to recommend and seek potential opportunities within her networks to support her mentees job prospects.