2019 Summer Public Health Scholars Program

Summary of Research Opportunities

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Benjamin Ansa, MD, MSCR

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Research Interest:
I. Chronic disease and cancer epidemiology, prevention and control
II. Health disparities (inequities)
III. Health outcomes and Health services utilization

List of Potential Projects:
I. Health services utilization patterns among adults with chronic conditions
II. Colorectal cancer survival among clinical and socio-demographic groups

Expectation for Summer Scholar:
Scholars are expected to participate in following activities and to meet once weekly to discuss the progress of assigned work:
I. Literature review
II. Analysis of secondary data sets
III. Poster presentation of results of data analyses
IV. Manuscript preparation for publication

Recent Publications:
• Trends in HIV Testing among Adults in Georgia: Analysis of the 2011–2015 BRFSS Data
• TEACH Kitchen: A Chronological Review of Accomplishments
• The Eating and Cooking Healthy (TEACH) Kitchen: A Research Protocol
• Paranasal sinus squamous cell carcinoma incidence and survival based on Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results data, 1973 to 2009
Steven Coughlin, PhD, MPH

Research Interest: Women's health, breast cancer survivorship

List of Potential Projects:
• Analysis of data from Augusta, Georgia Breast Cancer Survivor Study, or Cardiovascular Disease Outcomes among Breast Cancer Survivors study

Expectation for Summer Scholar:
• Data entry analysis of data, preparation of a poster
• Analysis of data
• Preparation of a poster

Recent Publications:


K. M. Monirul Islam, MBBS/MD, MPH, PhD

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Research Interest:
Dr. Islam’s research foci are clinical outcomes and patient-centered outcomes research in cancer, infectious diseases, and interventions program evaluation. He is particularly interested in clinical epidemiology and early detection, diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes of diseases. The overarching objective of Dr. Islam’s research is to prevent diseases and lead to better treatment outcomes among diverse populations including resource-limited communities such as minorities and rural populations.

List of Potential Projects:
Students interested in outcomes and comparative clinical and public health research are encouraged to contact me.

a) Incidence, mortality, and survival studies of Lung, Colon & Rectum, Liver, Pancreas, Gallbladder, and breast cancers.
b) Global infectious diseases outcomes projects specifically, TB, MDR-TB, STIs, Malaria, and Hepatitis as well as childhood infections.
c) Students are required to work with mentor faculty member to develop specific aims of the project after conducting a literature review. Then, work on the project to develop the study design, methods, data collection & analysis, write results and make the conclusion.

There will be some data analysis help from the mentor faculty member for the project.

The expectation for Summer Scholar:
a) Students will prepare a poster for presentation describing the project with the following sections: abstract, background, methods, findings/results, and conclusions.
b) Students will draft a manuscript with the mentor based on the project with the goal of submitting the manuscript for publication.

Other Information:
During the summer, I will be in the office on most days from 8:30 AM to 5:00 PM with the exception of vacation and research-related travel. I will post my summer schedule soon.

Recent Publications:


Research Interest:
Dr. Johnson’s research is focused on the implementation of evidence-based practices for substance abuse prevention and treatment. Recently, this work has incorporated technology as a means of enacting behavior change within this field. Ongoing grant-funded projects include: 1) training health professional students to identify and address unhealthy alcohol and drug use in patients; 2) improving health literacy and health outcomes (including substance use) in correctional populations; 3) increasing the likelihood of successful offender reentry by initiating substance use disorder treatment before release; 4) implementing alcohol and drug screening and brief intervention in clinics in Georgia’s rural and underserved areas.

List of Potential Projects:
a) The impact of alcohol and drug screening and brief intervention training on health professional students
   _Project Aim: The aim of this project is to analyze data collected from health professional students who receive training in alcohol and drug screening and brief intervention to determine the impact of this training on student confidence in and attitudes toward addressing unhealthy alcohol and drug use in patients.
   _Project-specific Outcomes: The student scholar will assist with the analysis of data collected before and after student training.

b) Promoting health literacy and improved self-care management of incarcerated populations using secure tablet technology
   _Project Aims: Aim 1: Analyze and write a manuscript from needs assessment data collected from incarcerated populations. Aim 2: Analyze data collected from a tablet based health literacy intervention conducted with incarcerated populations.
   _Project-specific Outcomes: The student scholar will assist with analysis of health needs assessment data as well as pre- and post-survey data from a health literacy intervention collected from incarcerated populations.

c) Addressing the opioid epidemic in Georgia
   _Project Aims: To determine the extent to which efforts to address the opioid epidemic have been implemented throughout the state by collecting and analyzing survey data collected from pharmacies and/or law enforcement agencies regarding the availability and use of Narcan (an opioid overdose reversal medication) and medication drop boxes (for safe disposal of prescription opioids).
   _Project-specific Outcomes: The student scholar may assist with data collection, data analysis and/or manuscript development for this project.

d) Implementation of newly funded grants
Project Aims: Both the “offender reentry project” and the “implementation of alcohol and drug screening and brief intervention in rural/underserved clinics project” listed above will be in the early phases of data collection.

Project-specific Outcomes: The student scholar may engage with these projects by attending team meetings, attending training sessions, assisting with data collection, and providing their insight on improving project implementation. While the scholar will gain good experience, there is unlikely to be a specific “product” generated from these projects during this period.

Expectation for Summer Scholar:

a) Students will prepare a poster for presentation describing the project with the following sections: abstract, background, methods, findings/results, and conclusions.
b) Students will draft a manuscript with the mentor based on the project with a goal of submitting the manuscript for publication.

Other Information:
During the summer, I will be in the office on most days from 8:30AM to 5PM with the exception of about 10 days of travel in mid-June and a vacation week in late July.

Recent Publications:


Richard W. Sams II, MD, MA (Bioethics)

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Research Interest: bioethics; end of life issues / palliative care; love as a moral force in medicine; moral dimensions of medicine

List of Potential Projects:
   A. A qualitative study exploring what nurses and doctors think it means to love their patients.
   B. Outcomes of patients who screened positive for needing palliative care in the ED

Expectation for Summer Scholar:
   A. Complete surveys with doctors and nurses and help organize, analyze and synthesize the data.
   B. Conduct chart reviews on patients who screened positive for needing palliative care when they presented to the ED. Assist in analyzing and synthesizing the data.

Recent Publications:
Victoria Madray, Sarvani Ginjupalli, Osama Hashmi MPH, Richard Sams MD MA, J. Aaron Johnson PhD, Benjamin Stoff MD MA Access to Dermatology Services at Free Medical Clinics, A National Survey. JAAD. Pending publication

Wilkins J, Sams R, Carpenter M. “Hepatitis B: Screening, Prevention, Diagnosis, and Treatment.” American Family Physician. Pending Publication.

Research Interest: Epidemiology, hospital acquired infections, sexually transmitted infections

List of Potential Projects:
• Patient outcomes related to hospital acquired infections or sexually transmitted infections

Expectation for Summer Scholar:
• Have a clinical background, interest in the topic or population and some basic research knowledge culminating into poster and/or publication.

Recent Publications:
Research Interest:
Dr. Vitacco’s research interests are focused on forensic evaluation of criminal behavior and outcomes of individuals found not guilty by reason of insanity (NGRI) and returned to the community. In addition, he is interested in aspects of clinical-forensic evaluations including methodologies that improve forensic assessment and predicting violence. Ongoing projects include collaborations with several states across the country (Louisiana, Minnesota, Virginia, and Colorado) looking at aspects of their programs for the evaluation and community return of NGRI acquittees.

List of Potential Projects:
1. Malingering evaluation in individuals with intellectual disabilities. This involves analysis of archival data and evaluating the efficacy of various instruments with this specialized population. This has significant impact for how forensic evaluators conduct assessments with individuals with cognitive issues. The student-scholar will have the opportunity to enter and analyze data for a conference presentation. In addition, student-scholars may have opportunities to observe forensic evaluations for the court and participate in specialized mental health law seminars.

2. Reoffender reentry project is something I am partly involved in. my contribution is the evaluation of psychopathy and then determining if these traits relate to problems with reentry or community behavior (recidivism, probation violation, drug use, to name a few). The student-scholar will have the opportunity to conduct clinical interviews using the Psychopathy Checklist-Revised with individuals in the project. Student-scholar will receive training on structured interviewing and scoring and be involved in aspects of data collection and manuscript preparation.

3. Outcomes of conditionally released NGRI acquittees is ongoing with multiple state involvement. The student-scholar will have the opportunity to work on a project with pre-existing data and develop that into a conference presentation or even a potential publication. In addition, student-scholars may have opportunities to observe forensic evaluations for the court and participate in specialized mental health law seminars.

A specific schedule will be developed if a student chooses any of these projects. Students will be expected to work both collaboratively and independently throughout the course of the summer. Schedule will vary by week.