PhD Students

UCSF Epidemiology and Translational Science PhD Students (2010 ? 2015)

Ekland Abdiwahab, MPH (2015)

Education: University of California, Davis (BS, Microbiology); University of Minnesota School of Public Health (MPH, Community Health Promotion, Health Disparities Interdisciplinary Concentration)

My academic interests include health equity, cancer disparities, and methods in social epidemiology. My research focuses on how early life factors in concert with neighborhood characteristics influence cancer risk among Black Americans. For my dissertation I aim to investigate the association between trajectories of adverse experiences across the life-course (i.e. childhood, adolescence, and adulthood) and cancer risk factors, and how residential racial segregation modifies this relationship among Black women.
Vignesh Arasu, MD (2015)

Education: Harvey Mudd College (BS Neuroscience), UCSF (MD, Residency/Fellowship Radiology)

I am a clinical radiologist specializing in cancer imaging, and my research interests are broadly in breast cancer imaging and imaging utilization. Most of my research focuses on developing precision imaging models in breast cancer. I work on two multicenter trials in this regard, the WISDOM study (personalized breast screening) and ISPY-2 study (personalized breast cancer treatment), where UCSF serves as the lead site. These trials integrate mammography or breast MRI as "biomarkers" of risk or treatment response to guide clinical decisions. Through the doctoral program, I hope to gain a deep understanding of research methodology to be able to push my work to be as innovative and impactful as possible. I am also interested in understanding techniques such as "big data" mining, genetic epidemiology, and NLP/machine learning.

Stephen B. Asiimwe, MD (2015)

I do research among adults in sub-Saharan Africa aimed at reducing mortality from infectious diseases. In this setting, high prevalence of HIV and other infectious diseases commonly result in young adults going down with various forms of critical illness. Against a backdrop of rampant resource-limitations hindering the provision of comprehensive acute care at hospitals, it is common to see a young person, like aged 20, dying, from, of all things, a bacterial infection. A death of this nature would be very strange in some parts of the world. My studies mostly focus on this problem; i.e., the death of young people from infections; why it happens, and what we can do about it. I use epidemiologic causal inference techniques to investigate some mortality risk factors (HIV-associated malignancies, severe sepsis, and malnutrition). My research is also aiming to increase the utilization of aggregated clinical data and associated technologies to solve some clinical problems and to promote learning from treatment activities.
Kristina Van Dang, MPH (2016)

Education: University of California, Berkeley (BA, Economics; BA, Molecular and Cell Biology); Emory University (MPH, Epidemiology)

Research Focus: My research outlined how to combine data and evidence in methods for meta-analysis of observational studies in epidemiology (MOOSE). I applied these guidelines to how iron indicators can be used to estimate risk of colorectal cancer, and understand how public health systems improve health outcomes during disasters. Additionally, I studied how health incentives can be offered to increase follow-up HIV testing in Zambia. I'm interested in how health can be improved through innovative data structures.

Chloe Eng, MSPH (2016)

Education: Northeastern University (BS, Health Science); Emory University (MSPH, Epidemiology)

My research interests include social epidemiology methods and the relationship between lifecourse socioeconomic exposures and aging. My interest in social epidemiology began while assisting a health educator counseling disadvantaged Hispanic immigrants with newly diagnosed diabetes in the San Francisco Bay Area. I continued to explore health disparities in a variety of contexts, including neighborhood access to childhood education and community physical activity in Boston, nutrition patterns in various regions of the US, and social determinants of blood pressure in South African young adults. As a doctoral student, I'm interested in further exploring mechanisms behind such social factors as risk factors for chronic disease, and to reduce biases in the measurement of social determinants of health in diverse aging populations.
Adrienne Epstein, MS (2017)

Education: Macalester College (BA, Biology); Harvard University (MS Global Health and Population)

My broad research interests include the application of spatial methods to improve surveillance for vector-borne diseases. I became interested in malaria while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guinea. Although I worked as a teacher, health was a major issue in my community, and much of my work entailed malaria education. For my Master's thesis, I investigated barriers pregnant women face to receiving proper malaria treatment in Guinea. As a doctoral student, I hope to expand my skillset to achieve a greater impact in improving health outcomes in malaria-vulnerable populations.

Amanda Irish, DVM, MPH (2016)

Prior to my MPH, I was a practicing small animal veterinarian for four years. Perhaps unsurprisingly, my main research interests fall within the One Health initiative focusing on the intersection of human, animal, and environmental health especially as applied to zoonotic and vector-borne diseases. During my MPH I gained an interest in health disparities and in GIS, and hope to incorporate these into future research. Outside interests include travel, art, reading, running, hiking, and course, spending time with my cat and dogs.

Raj K. Kalapatapu, MD (2014)

My clinical background includes working with psychiatric patients of all ages and substance use disorders. My research focuses on the theme of cognitive rehabilitation for individuals with substance use disorders. My goal in the PhD program is to become a solid clinical trial researcher, learning how to design and analyze clinical trials. I would like to apply this knowledge to the field of cognitive rehabilitation.
Dan Kelly, MD, MPH (2017)

Education: Princeton University (AB Chemistry); Albert Einstein College of Medicine (MD); UC Berkeley, (MPH)

My interest is in the study of the epidemiology and natural history of EVD survivorship and unreported infections in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I am interested in research capacity building to support the development of individuals and degree-granting programs in countries where viral hemorrhagic diseases and health inequities are endemic.

Crystal Langlais (2017)

Education: Eastern Washington University (BS Biology); University of Arizona, (MPH)

My professional research experience is centered around pediatric acute illness and injury. In my doctoral training, I am shifting my focus to genetic and early life exposures associated with chronic disease onset, particularly in relation to cancers and cardiovascular disease. I am especially interested in how modifiable risk factors associated with chronic diseases interact with genetic factors to influence disease onset and how these relationships result in different disease trajectories across populations.
Megha Mehrotra, MPH (2014)

My background and interests are in HIV prevention. Prior to joining the PhD program, I spent 5 years working on the iPrEx and iPrEx OLE HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis studies at the Gladstone Institutes. For my dissertation research, I'm interested in using causal inference methods to improve implementation of biomedical interventions. Specifically, I'm interested in using transportability to inform policy and implementation of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis.

Francois Rerolle, MS (2016)

Education: Ecole Polytechnique, France (Ms, Engineering); Stanford University (Ms, Environmental Engineering)

I am interested in the epidemiology of infectious diseases and their socio-economic impacts in less-developed countries. I have conducted research on the epidemiology of Lymphatic Filariasis in Cameroon and as an environmental engineer, participated in numerous WASH studies. At UCSF, I hope to join the Malaria Elimination Initiative (MEI) and specialize in spatial epidemiology. In my spare time, I like to discover California and the San Francisco area, hiking, climbing, surfing or simply hanging out with friends.

Education: University of California, Berkeley (BS, Nutrition; MPH, Public Health Nutrition); UCSF (RD, Clinical Nutrition)

My research interest is in type 2 diabetes prevention among vulnerable populations of low socioeconomic status and racial/ethnic minorities. I am also interested in nutritional exposures that increase risk of diabetes and identifying the most effective interventions to reduce these exposures. My dissertation focuses on evaluating the role of central and generalized adiposity, added sugars, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease in the development of cardiometabolic disease and diabetes, and assessing if these relationships vary among different racial/ethnic groups. My research is supported by an F31 Predoctoral Fellowship award funded by the National Institutes of Health/National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Michelle Roh, MPH (2015)

My interest in infectious disease epidemiology began as an MPH student working with MSF Epicentre in Uganda conducting studies on host genetic risk factors influencing future malaria elimination strategies in sub-Saharan Africa. Having a strong background in microbiology and epidemiology, I am particularly interested in the intersection of these two fields and how they could be integrated to develop effective interventions for infectious disease diagnosis, prevention, and control. By obtaining my PhD, I look forward to advancing my knowledge in mathematical modeling and disease surveillance to understand disease dynamics, with a primary focus upon malaria. To that end, my goal is to transition these skills to direct targeted interventions and shape public policy.
My research interests lie in the interplay between our immune and metabolic function and infectious diseases, especially parasitic diseases. I am particularly interested in how human actions have complicated and affected these relationships. My research background includes several years in molecular biology and neurophysiology prior to pursuing epidemiology and research on the microbiome. My goal in pursuing a PhD is to broaden my knowledge of statistics relevant to analyzing large-scale sequencing data sets and immunological data. Ultimately, I wish to pursue a career applying epidemiologic skills to methodological questions to better understand the role that our immune and metabolic function play in mediating the efficacy of our drugs and our ability to fight diseases.