



**Li Su**

*Lab Director and Researcher*

*Department of Environmental Health - EOME Program*

**Background**

In 1997, Li Su joined the Harvard School of Public Health as a Research Assistant in one of David Christiani's first labs within the Harvard School of Public Health. David Christiani is a Professor of Environmental Genetics & Professor of Medicine as well as a practicing physician at Mass General Hospital. Li had started working at Mass General Hospital in 1992 as a phlebotomist and then as a Clinical Medical Assistant, which is where she first began working alongside David Christiani who shared patients that Li was assisting. After establishing a working relationship together, David felt confident that Li had the right skill set and experience to establish and get his new lab up and running. For more history, Li was also a nurse and a cytogeneticist in China before moving to the U.S. in 1987.

Since Li joined HSPH in 1997, Li has not only proven herself to be knowledgeable, hard-working and highly skilled as a researcher but has done so well that she is now the Lab Director for David Christiani's labs! Over the past 15 years, it is clear that Li has worked her way up the career ladder having held titles such as Research Assistant I, Research Assistant II, Research Specialist to the title she holds today as Lab Director/Researcher. David contributes much of the success of his research and outcomes from Li's strong work ethic, attention to detail and ability to get along with all individuals in his research team.

As a Lab Director, Li Su is responsible for overseeing the day to day operations of the lab, implementing laboratory safety procedures, maintaining service contracts on equipment and making sure the laboratory has the equipment necessary to function effectively. She is also responsible for the management and training of the lab staff that can range from 10-15 individuals at a given time. As a manager, Li also serves as a mentor and friend to her staff and makes herself available to everyone when needed for either education, guidance, and/or coaching. As the Lab Director, one of her many critical tasks is to set up new research labs as new funding and research priorities come down the pipeline. This requires the ability to negotiate with vendors, work with operations/facilities and partner with faculty to discuss needs.

As a fellow researcher in the labs, Li has autonomy to conduct independent scientific research that has a focus on molecular epidemiology of chronic environmental diseases. She is responsible for the analysis of all samples that come into the lab for DNA, RNA, genotyping and/or proteomics analysis.

**Attributes for Success**

When asked what attributes led to Li's success over the years, Dr. Christiani responded that he and colleagues feel that Li has "a solid foundation of knowledge, a strong work ethic and good

character.” Li continued to explain that in the field of research, you have to have confidence in your skills and ability in order to get the job done. She believes that it is critical to keep yourself abreast of all the latest technologies that become available and to never stop learning and finding out what is going on out there in the world. She recommends taking advantage of the Tuition Assistance Program as this will help keep your education up to date and to find other areas of interest you might have. Li utilized the University’s education assistance to continue improving her English skills as English is her second language.

Li also believes in having “good character”. You must be able to communicate effectively with all levels which is also a critical competency as both a researcher and lab director. Li feels that having a good character has led to her being a “mother” figure in the labs as the staff and students come to her for advice and guidance. This brings her joy as she is motivated by making people happy and satisfied with the work they do.

### **Most Enjoyable Part of Working at the Harvard School of Public Health**

What does Li enjoy most about working at Harvard? Her response, “I love working in the University setting. Working with students and David Christiani is great. The research work I do here is very important and I am happy to be a part of it in anyway. I always think of the patients that I used to help in Mass General and remember that this work helps them.”

### **Resource to You**

Interested in learning more about Li Su and her research working or getting one on one advice from Li herself? Contact her directly via email!