



# SBS

Social and Behavioral Sciences  
HARVARD T.H. CHAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## newsletter

SPRING 2017

### LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Dear SBS community,

Congratulations to the students graduating in May! We're on the home stretch, and I wish you all brilliant success in your job searches.

This spring we had twelve doctoral candidates successfully defending their dissertations. I believe that's a new record. Well done!

Our Department also welcomed almost 40 students to our Admitted Student Open House held on March 31.

We are pleased to mark the improvements made to the student rooms on the 6th and 7th floors (added standing desks, fresh paint, comfortable chairs, and new computers). The data projectors in our seminar rooms got replaced – just in time for the doctoral defenses!

To our alums reading this newsletter, it was fantastic to be able to catch up with several of you last month during a trip to UW Seattle. I was visiting the campus as the Walker Ames visiting professor. During my week there I gave a few talks and also met with a bunch of HSPH alums including graduates of SBS. It's always inspiring to see how our graduates are contributing to improving the nation's health.

On the topic of alums, Binta Beard, SD '09 will be visiting the Department on May 1, to talk about her career path from doctoral student to Health Policy Strategic Adviser and Public Health Practitioner. Stay tuned for details.

Best wishes,  
Ichiro



### Inside this issue

- Research Spotlight.....2-3
- Marijuana Forum.....3
- Symposium on Health and Happiness.....4
- Social Landmark Update...4
- Awards and Announcements.....5
- New Year's Party.....6
- Arrivals.....7
- Events.....7
- Photo Contest.....8

### Events

- Eric Kim Seminar**  
Wed, April 19, 12:30pm
- Inequality and Health in the US**, Mon, April 24, 5:30pm
- SBS Staff Retreat**  
Fri, April 28
- Binta Beard Visit,  
Mon, May 1
- Last Day of Classes**  
Fri, May 12
- SBS Commencement Party**  
Wed, May 24, 7pm
- MCH/BU Joint Webinar**,  
Thurs, May 25

## Research Spotlight: Cancer Prevention with the BFD



**Emily Sparer, postdoc**

### **How did you get involved in firefighter research?**

The collaboration with the Boston Fire Department (BFD) started in 2015, when the BFD reached out to my mentor, Dr. Glorian Sorensen, expressing concern about cancer. They were worried that firefighters in Boston were being diagnosed with cancer at alarmingly high rates and at ages much too young. They knew something had to be done and wanted to collaborate with researchers to investigate. I had just started working with Dr. Sorensen as a post-doc, and this project built off of my interests and expertise in the ways in which environmental, behavioral, and organizational factors interact in the workplace to impact health outcomes. It was a great opportunity to lead a project that involved working closely with a community partner, learning about a new industry and complex mixture of exposures, and (hopefully) improves the health and safety of firefighters.

### **Why did you specifically choose the fire station to conduct an exposure assessment as opposed to in the field?**

I started the project by first talking to members of the BFD and the Firefighters Local 718 Union to understand more about their concerns and questions. I also went to the scientific literature to find out what others had found on the link between firefighters and cancer. What I found was that most of the epidemiologic literature exploring the exposure/outcome relationship among firefighter and cancer has focused on short-term, high-intensity exposures encountered while fighting fires. Little information exists on the potential contribution to firefighter cancer risk of chronic low-level exposures, such as what firefighters experience during time spent at the fire station (including poor air quality and off-gassing of contaminants from fire-exposed gear). Previous studies have also not accounted for other factors that may influence cancer risk such as exposure from second jobs or the contribution of behavioral factors such as diet, exercise, and sleep. For firefighters, the fire station is a second home. Not only do they work there, but they sleep, eat, exercise, and experience long periods of down time in the stations. They may even spend the majority of their 24-hour shift at the station itself. As researchers trying to understand the elevated cancer rates seen in firefighters, we need to learn more about the role of the fire station.

### **How can organizational policies and practices influence the environment of the firehouse and in turn the outcomes of cancer prevalence among firefighters?**

An organization's policies not only indicate how actions related to health and safety may be carried out, but they can also say a lot about the organizations priorities (how important health and safety are relative to other factors). Organizational practices may be quite similar to the policies – but this is not always the case.

Practices are known as “how it’s done around here”. That is, just because an organization has a written policy about something doesn’t mean it is carried out in practice.

As part of our work investigating how activities at the fire station may influence cancer risk and identifying possible interventions, it is crucial to examine the BFD’s organizational policies and practices at the fire station. For example, diesel exhaust from idling trucks in the fire stations may contribute to poor air quality in the stations, and in turn, impact firefighter health and cancer risk. By understanding both the organizational policies and practices related to ventilation, we can learn about the working conditions at the fire station and the variability that may exist between stations, as well as help to identify

potential intervention targets for the future. Another example relates to the potential off-gassing of chemicals from bunker gear (the clothes firefighters wear) after fires. The policies and practices that relate to how and when the gear is cleaned, as well as where it is stored, and can help us learn about potential adverse exposures firefighters encounter and where we may be able to make effective and sustainable change.

*-Interview by Whitney Waddell*

Read more about Emily Sparer’s work here: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/03/01/research-aims-assess-cancer-risks-boston-fire-stations/Hx4qC9MDmsmGGf24dC9rdN/story.html>

## Marijuana: The Latest Scientific Findings and Legalization

Marie McCormick and Vaughan Rees served as expert panelists on the March 24th Forum “***Marijuana: The Latest Scientific Findings and Legalization.***”

Dr. McCormick, Chair of the Committee on the Health Effects of Marijuana relayed some of the evidence of positive health effects of cannabis including relief from chronic pain, muscle spasms from multiple sclerosis, and nausea from chemotherapy as well as some of the negative effects that come with acute use including impairments in learning, memory and attention.

Dr. Rees shared his perspective on the changing regulatory environment for marijuana and the need for good evidence-based strategies to limit promotions and marketing of marijuana products especially among vulnerable populations.

Check out the video here: <https://theforum.sph.harvard.edu/events/marijuana/>

Read the National Academies Press report here: <https://www.nap.edu/read/24625/chapter/1>



## Symposium on the Science of Health and Happiness



*David Lee, Chairman of the Lee Kum Kee Family Foundation and Vish Viswanath, Co-Director of the Center for Health and Happiness.*

The Symposium on the Science of Health and Happiness took place at the Joseph B. Martin Center on Friday, December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2016. The day-long symposium featured keynote addresses from distinguished scholars in the field, Professors Ed Diener and Andrew Steptoe, as well as lively panel discussions by Harvard scholars. These discussions focused first on the current state of science for understanding the relationship between positive mental and physical health and then on best practices or issues in translating research to influence practice and policy. Panel speakers included Professors Daniel Gilbert, Lisa Berkman, Steve Gortmaker,

Sara Bleich, Michael Norton and Dr. Jeff

Huffman. The event was attended by over 150 students, faculty, fellows and staff and served as an introduction of the Center to the academic community. Speakers and panelists discussed recent findings in the field of psychosocial epidemiology and the link between health and positive psychological well-being, as well as how we can effectively translate some of these more basic science findings into practice and policy.

*- Natasha Rossi*

## Social Landmark Group



Hi, all!

We are Krisztina Gero and Masayoshi Zaitso, your new Social Landmark co-chairs.

We are excited to host some social activities this year. Our last event was the Landmark Happy Hour at Bar Louie in the Fenway. Our next event is a research meeting with Dr. Steve Gortmaker happening on April 26 from 12:30-2:00PM in Landmark 403Q.

Please feel free to stop by our offices to introduce yourself. We look forward to meeting you!

*- Krisztina and Masa Z*

## Awards & Announcements

- **Kathryn M. Barker, SD '18**, presented her dissertation research at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS): "Adolescent Sexual Debut: Relative Influences of Social Network, School, and Neighborhood" on February 18, 2017.
- **Rachel Bishop, MPH 65 '18** was awarded the Rappaport Institute Public Policy Fellowship from the Harvard Kennedy School. As a Fellow, she will join a multidisciplinary network of graduate students working in Massachusetts local government over the summer.
- **Adolfo Cuevas** accepted an assistant professor position at Tufts' Community Health Department.
- **Steven Hafner, SD '18**, made several presentations this past fall, including at the Society for the Advancement of Hispanics/Chicanos and Native Americans in Science, the American Indian Science and Engineering Society, the American Society of Criminology, and the Office for Victims of Crime's Indian Nations Conference. Steven was also awarded a 2-year supplement to his grant from the US Department of Justice (2015-IJ-CX-0014) in support of his doctoral studies.
- **Farah Qureshi, SD '18**, was awarded with a Rose Traveling Fellowship for the summer of 2017 through the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Department. This fellowship will allow her to spend a month working on her dissertation in Rotterdam, The Netherlands with the Generation R study team at Erasmus Medical Center.
- **Kathryn Smith, SD '19**, was recognized as a Meritorious Student Winner for her abstract *Dose Response Relationship Between Maternal Work Stress and Early Childhood Aggression in the Fragile Families Cohort*, at the 38th Annual Meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine.
- **Tess Timmes, MPH-45** in SBS, will be presenting at the 25th Anniversary Congress on Women's Health Conference in Washington, D.C. on April 28, 2017. She will be presenting her practicum work in Nepal, with a poster entitled, "Women's primary healthcare in Nepal: a pilot study in Dhulikhel Municipality."
- **Alvin Tran, SD '18** received a grant from the Open Gate Foundation to carry out a Qualitative Study on Unhealthy Weight Control Behaviors among Sexual Minority in Boston. He also received the Grant W. Farmer Scholarship for APHA Attendance in November 2016.
- **Ester Villalonga Olives** accepted a position as Assistant Professor at the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences School of Pharmacy and Medicine at University of Maryland.
- Congratulations to **Katie Cueva, Mathew Kiang, Farah Qureshi, Kathryn Smith** and **Natasha Sokol**, our SBS Travel Award recipients this semester!



# SBS New Year's Party



Live jazz by Joe Brogan Band.



Face painting by Kareema (Kiki) Roushdy.

The SBS Department held their annual New Year's party on January 23, 2017. Over 100 students, researchers, faculty, staff and family attended.



A young attendee enjoying refreshments.



Vaughan Rees with postdocs Adolfo Cuevas and Eric S. Kim.



Claudia Trudel-Fitzgerald with Ichiro Kawachi.



Katelyn Ferreira, Julia Caproni and Elizabeth Peters.



Jessica Davine with daughter Hope and husband, Geoff Tierney.



Nancy Krieger, Laura Kubzansky and Kirsten Davison.

## Arrivals



**Dr. Ananya Awasthi** has recently joined as the Assistant Director for the Harvard Chan India Research Center. Ananya will contribute to policy development & overall strategic planning for the India center in coordination with the Director, Dr. K. Vish Viswanath & the faculty at the school. She will provide leadership for intervention & evaluation activities at the center, oversee fiscal management & operations and will be serving as a key liaison between the director and the members of the India Advisory council & local partners. Welcome Ananya!



The SBS Department is excited to be hosting our second diversity intern, **Yaye Cheriff**. Ms. Cheriff is in her final year at Pine Manor College, located near Chestnut Hill. She is working to support the Grant Management Team this semester. Please welcome Yaye!

**Xiaomin Wang, Xudong Zhou, Gitte Lindved Petersen, Sotiris Vandoros, William Joe and Harumitsu Suzuki** were all recently welcomed as visiting researchers to the SBS Department.

Katie Giles,  
Program  
Manager at the  
PRC welcomed  
her second son,  
Elliot Giles  
Downing on  
October 13,  
2016.



The Smith  
family  
welcomed  
their second  
son, Emmett  
Kenneth on  
November  
30, 2016.

## Events

- ***Does Positive Psychological Functioning Influence Health Behaviors in Older Adults? Current Evidence and Future Directions*** presented by Eric S. Kim, PhD, *Research Fellow*, Wed, April 19, 12:30 – 1:30pm in Kresge 200. Light refreshments will be served. Sponsored by the Lee Kum Sheung Center for Health and Happiness.
- ***Inequality and Health in the US*** will feature presentations based on papers that were published by **Nancy Krieger** and **Madina Agenor**, and two alumnae, **Zinzi Bailey** and **Natalia Linos**. April 24, 5:30 – 7:00pm, TMEC Amphitheatre, Harvard Medical School. Visit the website: <http://tinyurl.com/n6urqj>
- **The SBS Staff Retreat** will be held on Friday, April 28 at the Arnold Arboretum for a day of team building activities. Please note that the administrative offices will be closed all day.
- **Binta Beard, SD '09** will give a talk on her career path from doctoral student to health consultant. Stay tuned for more details.
- **Maternal and Child Health, Children Youth and Families Center of Excellence and Boston University will present a Joint Webinar on Zika**, Thursday, May 25. Please stay tuned for more information.

## SBS Photo Contest

**Congratulations to our Photo Contest winners, Aude Richard, MPH '18 and Emily Sparer, postdoc.**

Aude  
Richard



In every city that I visited in Mexico, I found a market. These markets sell everything from clothes to household products to food. Food is a very significant part of the Mexican culture. The Mexican diet includes dishes cooked with fresh fruits and vegetables. Spices, especially chili pepper is a distinctive feature of the country's cuisine. However, markets in the country also sell many savory and sweet snacks, candies and sweetened beverages, all of which are consumed widely. Street food is also omnipresent in the country. It is a quick and affordable source of food but health risks occur in terms of infectious diseases due to undercooked meals and suboptimal handwashing.

Firefighting is a dangerous occupation with a high risk of many types of cancer. However, most studies investigating the link between firefighters and cancer focus on short-term, high-intensity exposures that are encountered while fighting fires, but have not accounted for chronic low-level exposures encountered at the fire station (e.g. diesel exhaust from trucks and off-gassing of contaminants from fire-exposed gear, or behavioral factors such as disrupted sleep and poor diet). My current research focuses on the impact of activities within the fire station on firefighter cancer risk and other health outcomes. These photos show a glimpse of life in the fire station.



Emily  
Sparer

Visit the Kresge 7th floor to see both photo series.

**Questions, suggestions, ideas? Email us: [sbs@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:sbs@hsph.harvard.edu)**

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