

August 2022

## Director's Message



As we put together these newsletters, we usually try to identify a theme – e.g. clinical translation or state policy. In this edition, we had a couple of late-breaking pieces that led to a different theme from the one we had originally intended. Below you will read about some stories that have developed across multiple years including a career achievement award, a training program with decades of history, and a long-term contract with the State of North Carolina. It is human nature to focus on things that are new and different, but it is also important to continue to do and celebrate the things that have been successful year after year. One particularly timely

aphorism from the last couple of years is that when public health is working well, you don't even notice it's there. The predictable excellence – the partnership with DHSR leading to greater insight by both the State and Sheps investigators, the HRSA Primary Care Research Fellowship training amazing emerging investigators, and Dr. Zimmerman conducting world-class research – can often be taken for granted.

The same goes for our co-workers; we get used to working with amazingly talented people who are a joy to spend time with and we don't always recognize the daily blessing of working alongside great colleagues. In the spirit of taking a pause and reflecting on long-run successes, I encourage you to send a quick email or note to a co-worker who you appreciate. I received one of these few weeks ago and it really brightened my day, and we all need more of that in these challenging times.

## 2022 AcademyHealth Annual Research Meeting

After 2 years of being virtual, AcademyHealth's in-person Annual Research Meeting was held in Washington, DC June 4-7 and UNC had a strong presence.

Several Sheps students, faculty, trainees, and alumni successfully presented their work either in poster form or through a podium presentation. NRSA postdoctoral trainee Suur Ayangeakaa, PhD presented her work on improving HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis service delivery among the underserved while Hannah Friedman, a 1st year NRSA predoctoral trainee, presented her research showing that rural Medicare beneficiaries are increasingly likely to be admitted to urban hospitals.



NRSA alumnus and current Carolina Health Workforce Research Center postdoctoral associate, Esita Patel, PhD, RN, presented on the revolutionary NC Nursecast tool to an engaged audience. Dr. Arrianna Planey, Rural Health Research Program researcher, gave two podium presentations at the conference sharing her work on culturally responsive research methods and measuring the impact of policy strategies.

Sheps poster topics included rural residency planning and development programs, appropriateness of hysterectomy as a treatment for noncancerous gynecologic conditions, older adults with AML, rural and nonrural racial variation in mentally unhealthy days, tele-behavioral

health and COVID-19, burnout among low-wage frontline workers during COVID-19, and lower preventive care and cancer screenings among rural adults in the south who must travel long distances to a hospital.

The conference was capped off with an alumni & friends reception hosted by the department of Health Policy and Management and the Sheps Center held on the evening of June 6th. The event was well attended and offered a great opportunity for current and past UNC colleagues to catch up after a 2-year hiatus.

The Center is looking forward to next year's meeting in Seattle!

## SHEPSTER SPOTLIGHT!



### Evan Galloway, MPS

Evan has been at Sheps for six years as part of the Program on Health Workforce Research and Policy. His main areas of interest are workforce data visualization and data analysis. For instance, one of his first projects was an [interactive visualization](#) using the licensure data in the Health Professions Data System. More recently, he has enjoyed working with geospatial datasets for two projects examining the colocation of healthcare providers. When not at his computer, Evan can be found spending time with his wife and two sons, running, working on house/garden projects, or learning (very slowly) to play the piano.

## Research News

### CCQI Project Spotlight: Care4Moms

The [Care4Moms project](#) (Principal Investigator: Allison Stuebe) analyzed CCQI claims data to address a paucity in the current research on mothers with medically fragile infants (MMFI) with the goal of improving health outcomes for this group through targeted postpartum care.



During their analysis, Stuebe and her team identified multiple challenges faced by mothers and their infants. Among other findings, the study identified racial and ethnic inequities present for mothers of MMFIs in the assessment and treatment of pain during the postpartum period.

These findings triggered other projects by the Care4Moms team of investigators. Informed by their analysis, Stuebe spearheaded a related initiative entitled "The 4th Trimester," which aims to identify the unmet healthcare needs of mothers and infants during the first few months of an infant's life.

Care4Moms has also advanced knowledge surrounding data management in the clinical environment. The project collaborated with UNC Healthcare's IT department to create EMR design solutions to address issues in properly documenting and reporting on postpartum care. On the policy level, the project's findings were informed in an annual report to the North Carolina governor and general assembly and advanced policies around prenatal care at UNC. Specifically, the project demonstrated the existence of a sufficient infrastructure to support the expansion of North Carolina's Safe Sleep program, which aims to reduce infant mortality rates in the state.



The Center is excited to announce that the NRSA T32 Primary Care Research Fellowship has been refunded! This fellowship is funded by HRSA and has been a long-standing program of the Sheps Center training portfolio. Under the leadership of Katrina Donahue, MD, MPH, the fellowship trains pediatric, family medicine, and internal medicine physicians to be top notch health services researchers. Drs. Brittany Raffa and Jennifer Guttierrez-Wu, both pediatricians, will be joining the training program on July 1st after a year of non-NRSA funded research at Sheps. Dr. Donahue hopes to recruit a couple more fellows to the program in the coming year to join this cohort. Drs. Ebiere Okah and Wade Harrison completed their appointments with the fellowship this year and the group recently hosted a gathering where Drs. Okah and Harrison were honored and Dr. Okah also received the Donald E. Pathman Outstanding Publication Award.

### Zimmerman Earns GSA's 2022 Robert W. Kleemeier Award

The Gerontological Society of America (GSA) — the nation's largest interdisciplinary organization devoted to the field of aging — has chosen Sheryl Zimmerman, PhD, FGSA, of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as the 2022 recipient of the Robert W. Kleemeier Award.

This distinguished honor is given annually to a GSA member in recognition for outstanding research in the field of gerontology. It was established in 1965 in memory of Robert W. Kleemeier, PhD, a former president of the Society whose contributions to the quality of life through research in aging were exemplary.



Read more about this story [here](#).

## New Faces at the Sheps Center



### Phillip Maychek Data Analytics

Phil joined Sheps in May of 2022 after working with the Department of Public Safety in Juvenile Justice as a Statistician. He worked on a wide range of data analytics projects including data requests, research projects, modeling,

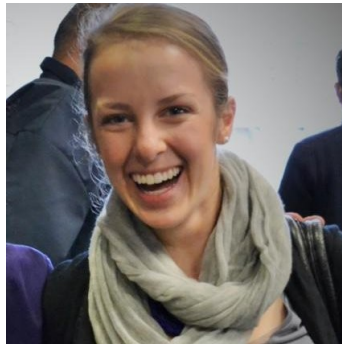


### Tylah Harrison Healthy Food First

Tylah is a senior from Durham, NC majoring in Health Policy and Management in the Gillings School of Global Public Health and minoring in Chemistry. She is an undergraduate research assistant with Seth Berkowitz's



and developing internal and public-facing dashboards. Phillip is passionate about serving the community in North Carolina and beyond seeing data as a way to bring hope and opportunities to every person.



**Susie Gurzenda**

**Rural Health Research Program**

Susie is a Research Project Manager/Analyst for the NC Rural Health Research Program. Currently, she splits her time between supporting Dr. Kristin Reiter and Dr. George Pink's work on the financial health of primarily rural, critical access hospitals and working with Dr. Mark Holmes on an evaluation of in-person health insurance enrollment efforts in North Carolina.

Health Food First study. Tylah is interested in health equity-focused research, especially relating to chronic diseases, and is an aspiring pediatrician.



**Katrice Perry**

**Program on Aging, Disability and Long-term Care**

Katrice is a Research Assistant who joined the Program on Aging, Disability, and Long-term Care in April 2022. She has worked at the Sheps Center since 2018 and is looking forward to bringing her education and experience to her new team. Outside of working at UNC, Katrice likes to hike and cook.

## State Partner Shout-out: NC Division of Health Service Regulation



For the past 25 years, the Sheps Center has partnered with the NC Division of Health Service Regulation (DHSR), a Division within NCDHHS, to provide data support for health planning.

Under the direction of the NC State Health Coordinating Council, the DHSR is responsible for developing the annual NC

State Medical Facilities Plan, which projects where new health care facilities and services will be needed in the future to serve the population.

Dr. Sandra Greene, who is a Senior Research Fellow at the Sheps Center, is Chair of the DHSR. To support this process, the Sheps Center has a contractual agreement with DHSR to receive discharge data from NC hospitals and ambulatory surgery centers for every patient who is treated at these facilities. These data provide a rich picture of what illnesses people are treated for, what kinds of care they receive and the cost of their care.

As Sheps Center staff analyze discharge data for our partners in Raleigh, patterns of care emerge that help guide health planning decisions. For example, in the first 4 months of the pandemic researchers saw inpatient care plummet as hospitals suspended elective procedures. In the second year of the pandemic, the average length of hospital stays in NC spiked by 25%, caused by the longer length of stays for COVID patients. Having these data enabled adjustments to plan methodologies so that better projections of future hospital bed needs could be met. Studying patterns of care from the discharge data year after year continues to raise interesting research questions like:

Why are folks in some counties hospitalized at twice or three times the rate of residents of other counties? Why are hospitalization rates for conditions that should be managed on an outpatient basis so high in some regions of the state? And why are ED visit rates and inpatient admission rates for opioid-related diagnoses spiking in parts of the state during the pandemic?

Sheps Center analysts are examining these questions today. These types of questions that arise from the data provide great opportunities for research and collaboration with our Raleigh partners in an effort to understand and guide improvements in health care services to North Carolinians.

## Upcoming Event Announcement

*2022 North Carolina Institute of Medicine  
Annual Meeting*

**BUILDING THE WORKFORCE  
FOR A HEALTHY  
NORTH CAROLINA**

**Keynote Speaker**

**Sue Hassmiller, PhD, RN, FAAN**

Senior Adviser for Nursing

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation



SAVE THE DATE

**TUESDAY,  
NOVEMBER 15, 2022  
8:00 AM - 4:00 PM**

MCKIMMON CENTER  
RALEIGH, NC

## Sheps In the News

A program for Black doulas and Black mothers at UNC aims to improve maternal health and create a workforce pipeline, supported by recommendations from **NCIOM taskforce**.

**Dr. Arrianna Planey** chats with NC Health News about financially unstable rural hospitals in NC's poorest counties.

**The North Carolina Medical Journal** was referenced in the following recent articles: a true crime podcast highlighting violence against NC's Indigenous people, communities of color are disproportionately impacted by hog waste operations and poultry factories, the positive effects of parks on your health, and excessive drinking's heavy burden on NC's society.

NC nurse practitioners say more freedom to treat patients will increase the number of healthcare providers in rural areas where doctors are hard to find according to **Sheps Workforce data**.

Rural hospitals continue to be monitored by the **Rural Health Research Program**, especially some in Texas that haven't closed but are struggling as well as hospitals that seem more stable than they actually are.

**NC Nursecast** models support Gov. Cooper's spending proposal and new nursing pathways in

community colleges.

Research fellow **Carrie Brown** delivered the graduation address for the College of Pharmacy & Health Sciences' 2022 Spring Commencement at Campbell University.

## Publication Spotlight

"[Implementing What we Preach: Anti-Racist Recommendations from the Academic Pediatric Leadership Development Nomination Committee Task Force](#)" is an article that Dr. Colin Orr and his co-authors sought to detail, for the larger academic pediatric and medical community, changes the Academic Pediatric Association (APA) was making to its nomination processes to identify, recruit, and develop the future leaders of academic pediatrics.

The Academic Pediatric Leadership Development Nomination Committee Task Force (LDNC Task Force) was formed in response to the tragic events that brought to light the disparities, inequities, and racism that individuals from minoritized communities face in the United States. The APA formed the LDNC Task Force with the charge of revising the leadership nomination process to be anti-racist and increase the diversity of applicants for leadership positions. The final product was 5 recommendations that will be implemented by the APA. The racial and ethnic diversity of children in the United States is increasing; however, the field of pediatrics is not representative of the children it serves. Increased diversity in the pediatric workforce is an important component of a multi-faceted approach to reducing health disparities. This work was conducted in parallel with other APA initiatives to cultivate a diverse workforce: [Anti-Racism & Diversity Toolkit](#) and [Changing Who Has a Seat and Voice at the Table](#)

A full list of Sheps Center publications from recent months can be found [here](#).

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[North Carolina Network Consortium](#)  
[North Carolina Rural Health Research Program](#)

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