New and Returning Fellows Arrive for Fall Semester!

As always we are happy to welcome our new fellows and to welcome back our second year fellows for another great year at SUNY Albany. As many of you know from personal experience, adjusting to a new environment is not easy. We are proud of our fellows for their desire to learn, their ability to adapt, and their perseverance through the many challenges that they face. As usual, our fellows come from diverse backgrounds and have varied research interests. Please take a moment to read about each of our current fellows:

**Julia Makarenko, MPH** joins us from Kyiv, Ukraine. Ms. Makarenko currently works at the Ukrainian Institute on Public Health Policy where she is a Project Manager and Co-Investigator. She holds a Masters of Public Health from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla. Her research interests include TB treatment adherence in IDU populations. She is in the second year of her MS Epi degree at SUNY Albany and plans on returning to Kyiv to continue her research at the conclusion of the program. Her particular area of interest is TB treatment among injecting drug users in Ukraine.

**Roksolana Kulchynska, MPH** is a second year fellow pursuing an MS Epi degree at SUNY Albany. Ms. Kulchynksa joins the program from Kyiv, Ukraine where she works for the AIDS Healthcare Foundation as a Prevention, Testing and Linkage Coordinator. She recently received a Masters of Public Health degree from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and plans on completing her MS degree in 2014. Her current research interests include the barriers for linkage to HIV care among Kyiv Oblast TB/HIV patients.

**Polina Girchenko, MA** comes to us from St. Petersburg Russia as a second year fellow in the MS Epi degree program at SUNY Albany. Ms. Girchenko holds a masters in sociology from the St. Petersburg State University. She is employed as a Project Manager and Fundraiser at the Fund for Medical and
Social Programs “Humanitarian Action.” Her research interests include IDU populations in St. Petersburg with an emphasis on rapid testing for HIV. Ms. Girchenko expects to complete her degree in May 2015 and return to St. Petersburg to continue her research with Humanitarian Action.

Serhii Myroshnycheko, MPH is a first year fellow joining us from Kyiv, Ukraine to pursue an MS Epi degree. Mr. Myroshnychenko holds an MPH degree from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy School of Public Health in Kyiv. He also studied political science at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Mr. Myroshnychenko currently works for Right to Health in Kyiv as a Project Assistant. Upon completion of his degree program in May 2016, he plans to return to Ukraine to continue his research projects.

Anna Metelyuk, MPA, MA joins us from Kyiv Ukraine as a first year fellow in the MS Epi degree program. She holds a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Law and Economics as well as an MA in linguistics from the Dnipropetrovsk National University. She is currently a HIV/STD/Hepatitis Consultant with AIDS Alliance Ukraine in Kyiv and has also worked for the Ukrainian Center for Disease Control and the Clinton Foundation. Ms. Meteliuk expects her degree in May 2016 and plans to return for Kyiv to continue her research.

Meruyert Darisheva, PhD is a first year fellow from Almaty, Kazakhstan pursuing an MS Epi degree at SUNY Albany SPH. Dr. Darisheva earned her doctorate in public health from the Kazakh School of Public Health in Almaty. At present, she is a project director for the Global Health Research Center of Central Asia (GHRCCA). She has held research positions with the Kazakhstan Ministry of Public Health and a teaching position at the Kazakh National Medical University.

Altyn Aringazina, PhD joins us from Almaty, Kazakhstan for a non-degree coursework at the SUNY Albany SPH Epidemiology Department. Dr. Aringazina is currently the Chair of the Department of Population Health and Social Sciences at the Kazakh School of Public Health in Almaty. She has held numerous research and lecture positions with the Kazakhstan School of Public Health and was a Fulbright Scholar at Columbia University. Dr. Aringazina plans on returning to Kazakhstan at the conclusion of the Fall 2014 semester to continue her research and resume her professional responsibilities at the Kazakhstan School of Public Health.
NYS–ITRP Participates in US-Georgia Workshop

From June 16-18, 2014 NYS-ITRP Director Dr. Jack DeHovitz and several program alumni participated in an international workshop entitled “U.S. – Georgia Program Development Workshop on HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Hepatitis” in Tbilisi, Georgia. This interdisciplinary research workshop was supported by the International Science and Technology Center (ISTC) and the Georgian Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs in partnership with the Embassy of Georgia, Washington, D.C., the Georgian National Center for Disease Control and Public Health (NCDC) and the Georgian Infectious Diseases, AIDS, and Clinical Immunology Research Center (IDACIRC). Scientific consultation was also provided by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (NIAID/NIH/HHS). This NIH funded conference was a direct outgrowth of a collaboration between Dr. DeHovitz and Dr. Tamar Tchedlize (MS Epi, Class of 2002) who now serves as the First Secretary of the Georgian Embassy in Washington.

Over the course of three days, government official and leading infectious disease experts reviewed U.S. – Georgian collaborations on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and hepatitis treatment and care strategies. The workshop content included a review of the current status of the epidemic in Georgia and proposals to develop new collaborations for future treatment, care and training programs. After the conclusion of workshop ISTC will be administering a seed-grant program.
The first day of the workshop was devoted to a review of HIV/AIDS in Georgia. Several NYS-ITRP alumni were asked to speak on various topics. Fogarty alumni Nino Badridze (MS Epi, Class of 2005) gave an overview of the HIV situation in Georgia. Her talk was followed by a lecture on the Molecular Epidemiology of HIV in Georgia given by another NYS-ITRP graduate, Natia Dvali (Postdoctoral Lab Training Program, Class of 2004). In the afternoon, participants heard a talk entitled “Cascade of HIV Care in Georgia: Implications for Test and Treat Strategy” given by NYS-ITRP alumni Ketevan Shermadini (Class of 2006). During the second afternoon session, Dr. Nikoloz Chkhartishvili (MS Epi, Class of 2008) spoke on the Georgian experience with ART delivery and the outcomes of universal access to ART. The first day was concluded by a presentation on the advances in HIV/HCV and HIV/ HBV co-infections given by Dr. Jack DeHovitz.

The second day of the workshop also featured several NYS-ITRP alumni who focused on Hepatitis C in Georgia. Fogarty alumni and collaborator Dr. Tengiz Tsertsvadze (Class of 1997) started the day as a co-chair of the HCV Plenary Session. In the following session, Marine Karchava (MS Epi, Class of 2006) reviewed the molecular epidemiology of HCV in Georgia with a focus on HCV 2k/1b recombinant strain among HCV genotype 2 patients. The session also included a collaborative presentation between Fogarty alumni Anna Kasradze (Collaborative MPH, Class of 2013) and Juliette Morgan of the US Center for Disease Control on a planned population survey on HCV in Georgia.

In the afternoon of the second day, Dr. DeHovitz co-chaired a panel with the First Secretary of the Embassy of Georgia to the United States, Tamar Tchelidze. The panel featured a presentation on the HCV treatment experience in Georgia by Dr. Tsertsvadze.

In addition to three full days of presentations, workshop participants also made several site visits including the Richard G. Lugar Center for Public Health Research (CPHR), the National Center for Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (NCTLD) and the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center (IDACIRC) where several of our alumni are conducting research projects.

NYS-ITRP is proud to have such substantial representation from alumni and faculty in collaborative events that provide innovative solutions to treatment and care issues in Georgia. We look forward to supporting our alumni in their research projects and to improve the HIV/AIDS, TB and HCV treatment in Georgia.
SUNY Downstate Hosts Fogarty Fellows for January Seminar

As part of the NYS-ITRP program, we organized an annual HIV Research and Implementation Science Seminar for all of our NYS-ITRP trainees at SUNY Downstate Medical Center (SUNY DMC) each January. This year all of our current Albany Fellows and visiting faculty members took part in the three day seminar intended to familiarize participants with the HIV/AIDS care models in the US. The seminar is also intended to assist fellows with developing their thesis projects, review research ethics, and develop a stronger understanding of behavioral factors related to HIV prevention.

On January 15, 2014, the first day of the seminar, fellows heard several lectures on the treatment of different HIV populations. After opening remarks by NYS-ITRP Director Dr. Jack DeHovitz, Ms. Katherine Marx MS, MPH provided a lecture on adolescent care issues in HIV, followed by a talk by Rebecca Schwartz PhD on behavioral studies in women with HIV. The first day concluded with visits to the SUNY DMC STAR Health Center where fellows had the opportunity to shadow Downstate clinicians and witness first-hand the operation of a HIV ambulatory care unit.

The second day of the seminar started with an overview of treatment as prevention by Dr. DeHovitz, followed by a workshop on IRB preparation by Susan Holman, MS, RN who is the STAR Program HIV Research Projects Director at SUNY DMC. Ms. Holman assists NYS-ITRP trainees with IRB submissions for the Advanced In-Country Research Support Grants for which all long-term NYS-ITRP alumni can apply.

Fogarty fellows were asked to present brief overviews of their research projects at the noon HIV Seminar held for SUNY DMC faculty and students. Each fellow presented a fifteen minute introduction of their research and answered questions on the HIV/AIDS epidemic in their home country. Following their presentations, Dr. Danielle Ompad, PhD, MHS from our NYU partner organization Center for Drug Use and HIV Research (CDHUR) gave a well received lecture on behavioral approached to HIV prevention in injection drug users. The last lecture of the day on the use of motivational interviewing in HIV prevention was given by David Odegaard, MPH the Director of Clinical Education in the STAR Program. Following a long day of presentations, fellows were invited to Dr. DeHovitz’ home for a reception in their honor.

The last day of the seminar started with a presentation by Lori Hurley, LMSW, MPH of SUNY DMC who discussed the patient navigator model in HIV care. Fellows had the opportunity to speak with several patient navigators and learn about the advantages and challenges of the model. Dr. Jameela Yusuff, MD, MPH also from SUNY DMC was the next speaker with an overview of HCV treatment in clinical practice. Following her presentation, NYS-ITRP welcomed back Dr. Sean Philpott PhD, MS in Bioethics of Union Graduate College to speak about ethical issues in research. Dr. Philpott is the PI of a Fogarty funded Research ethics training program focused on Eastern Europe and Central Asia.
Thus, his comments were particularly germane to the settings our trainees will be conducting their studies. Fellows had the opportunity to review their thesis projects and address any ethical issues with Dr. Philpott.

The closing lecture of the seminar was given by a leading researcher, Dr. Don Des Jarlais, PhD. His lecture on structural intervention to reduce HIV transmission in IDUs remains very relevant to the current situation in our target countries. Dr. Des Jarlais has participated in NYS-ITRP trainings since its development over 20 years ago.

We look forward to hosting our new cohort and second year fellows in January 2015 for another edition of this seminar. Please expect an update on this event in the next issue of NYS-ITRP Connection.

Trainee Spotlight: Alyona Mazhnaya

What motivated you to pursue training through the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program?

Several reasons contributed to this decision. Of course, some of them were strictly professional. I aspired to improve the necessary skills for my career development and to compete in the job market. This stimulus guides most of the beginners in the field. As a recent graduate from the School of Public Health at National University in Kyiv-Mohyla academy it was important for me to get a better sense how modern epidemiology techniques could be applied to programs in Ukraine. For these reasons Fogarty training was an exceptional opportunity for a young specialist.

However, there was one reason which at some level was more influential than a rational decision. It is the desire to absorb new knowledge and to be a part of an academic community that provides unique opportunities to make every day a pursuit for deeper understanding of health, its determinants and how they can be measured, sustained and improved. In this light, Fogarty NYS-ITRP was also an extraordinary window of opportunity for Ukraine.

What was your position before your training with NYS-ITRP?

I worked as a treatment unit assistant at “International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine” for almost a year before starting training with NYS-ITRP. It was a very timely transition because my work experience gave me real world experience on which I could build new knowledge.

Can you tell us what you remember about your experience while training in Albany?

It was a whole range of new experiences: from the creative approach to teaching to the way the student bears complete responsibility on the amount and quality of the knowledge he/she gets. For me Louise-Anne McNutt and Lenore Gensburg had the most impact on assembling
knowledge into problem solving skills and applying them in practice. Another thing that amused me is that library works 24/7 during exams – I used to almost live there.

**What is the focus of your current work?**
**How did the Fogarty New York State International Training and Research Program prepare you for what you are doing now?**

I am a project manager for the NIH-funded research project on expanding medication assisted therapies in Ukraine. This project is the result of the collaboration between Yale University School of Medicine and “International HIV/AIDS Alliance in Ukraine”. The latter is my current employer, so I have returned back to the organization I worked for before the program but in a totally different role. I am sure that without Fogarty NYS-ITRP I would not be even close to attaining my current position and advancing my professional knowledge at the rate I am doing now.

**What was the hardest part about living in the US? In Ukraine?**

Friends and acquaintances who had the experience of living in the US told me that I would miss food the most since eating habits of Ukrainians and US citizens differ a lot. However, what I missed the most is the rich, strong cup of espresso in the morning. Eventually, after some time spent exploring nearby coffee spots I found places that offered relatively good coffee. Back at home the biggest adjustment was searching for a good and easily accessible swimming facility because during my time in Albany swimming became a favorite activity for recreation.

**What is unique about the HIV epidemic in Ukraine and what specific challenges do you face in your field?**

Numerous discussions in scientific literature and the public health sector are concerned with the topic of the status of the HIV epidemic in Ukraine: generalized or concentrated, stable or growing, same in the whole country or different in each region. These discussions mirror one of the core challenges of the HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment field as well as the whole public health sector – lack of comprehensive and easily accessible information followed by proper analysis and presentation to guide the decision making process. Therefore, programs like Fogarty are adding to a critical mass of expertise to enhance the quality of public health in Ukraine.

**What are some of your future career plans?**

Where do I even start? From small research projects to eventually getting a PhD is a priority because this is a quality check for any person who is working in research. Additionally, one of my main visions is to forward knowledge and skills to new generations of students who are interested in making a difference in public health in Ukraine.

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**PEPFAR Project Moves Forward in Ukraine**

NYS-ITRP received a supplemental grant from PEPFAR (US President’s Emergency Plan for
AIDS Relief) to contribute expertise to on-going HIV research projects in Ukraine. NYS-ITRP faculty Danielle Ompad, PhD is our key consultant on these projects. Dr. Ompad is the Clinical Associate Professor at the NYU Global Institute of Public Health as well as the Deputy Director at the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research (CDUHR) at the NYU College of Nursing. CDUHR has been a frequent collaborator with NYS-ITRP research training projects for the past ten years. Dr. Ompad is working with the Monitoring and Evaluation team at AIDS Alliance Ukraine to evaluate the effectiveness of their HIV prevention services for injecting drug users in a country-wide study. Using a large robust data base and waves of questionnaires, Dr. Ompad are looking at associations between a package of intervention services and prevention outcomes that include indicators for HIV infection. The study is important as policy makers, NGOs, and research scientists must assess the impact of interventions on HIV risk reduction in a country with a high burden of disease and severely limited public health resources. Even in the wake of the current conflicts in Ukraine, Dr. Ompad traveled to Lviv in July and to Kiev in October to meet with research team members on the rollout of the project. Even in an environment of unrest, the project questionnaires continue to be implemented to substance users who receive prevention services in the cities across Ukraine with the highest seroprevalence of HIV.

Dr. Ompad also mentored two of our Ukrainian research trainees this summer in New York City. Roxalana Kulchynskaya and Julia Makarenko were able to participate in local research studies and activities involving HIV prevention activities directed at men who have sex with men, a group which has experienced a recent increase in HIV infections in Ukraine. Roxalana and Julia will also work with Dr. Ompad to analyze data from the AIDS Alliance HIV prevention project as part of their thesis development in Albany School of Public Health.

We are proud of our Ukrainian research colleagues and Dr. Ompad who persevere in these critical studies during a time of great national transition.

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**SUNY Downstate Participates in Global Health Conference**

As part of a continued effort to improve SUNY Global Health initiatives, SUNY Downstate and NYS-ITRP faculty and staff participated in an inaugural SUNY system wide meeting. The two day conference was held October 27-28, 2014 and was organized in collaboration with SUNY Buffalo and SUNY Downstate faculty staff. As a co-director of the SUNY Global Health Institute (SUNY GHI), NYS-ITRP director Dr. Jack DeHovitz played a leading role in planning and conceptualizing the meeting along with SUNY GHI co-director Dr. Gene Morse of SUNY Buffalo. The meeting was attended by SUNY faculty and officials who traveled to New York City from various SUNY campuses throughout New York State.

The SUNY GHI mission is to provide a mechanism for global health programs at the SUNY Academic Health Centers and system-wide universities and college campuses that will foster collaboration and innovation in education, training and research initiatives with international partners and regional corporate and economic leaders. The major goals of the institute include the development of inter-campus mechanisms for global health education and the conduct of innovative global
health research that promotes collaboration among faculty initiatives across SUNY campuses. The institute utilizes an integrated approach for educational programs and research cores to increase competitiveness for funding from state, federal, and international funding agencies and philanthropic organizations. SUNY GHI also strives to develop an educational services and consultative mechanism for resource limited countries to access SUNY faculty and staff with expertise in clinical education and research program development.

During the course of the meeting, NYS-ITRP was presented as a model for innovative approaches to international education. Dr. DeHovitz spoke at length about NYS-ITRP initiatives in our various target countries and highlighted the successful collaboration between SUNY Albany, NYS-ITRP and the Tbilisi State Medical University (TSMU). We look forward to the expansion of Global Health initiatives throughout the SUNY system under the guidance on the Global Health Institute.

NYS-ITRP Receives Supplemental Award for Spring 2015 Conference in Almaty, Kazakhstan

We are proud to announce that the NIH Fogarty International Center has awarded a supplemental grant to NYS-ITRP in the amount of $50,000. The award is intended for a major conference event in Almaty, Kazakhstan on Implementation Science to be held in April, 2015. An organizing committee has been formed and held its first meeting in Almaty on November 19th, 2014. At present, we are putting together an agenda and faculty for the event. Please follow us on social media (Facebook, Twitter) and look for email announcements with updates on this exciting event.
PUBLICATIONS

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Employed adults with asthma who have frequent workplace exposures. White GE, Mazurek JM, Storey E. J Asthma. 2014 Jul 29:1-6. PMID: 25029228


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Postsurgical wound infections due to rapidly growing mycobacteria in Swiss medical tourists following cosmetic surgery in Latin America between 2012 and 2014. Maurer F, Castelberg C, von...


Reply to “described diagnostic inconsistencies were observed with an obsolete version of the Xpert MTB/RIF assay and are unlikely to recur in the current version of the assay”. Somoskovi A, Bloemberg GV. J Clin Microbiol. 2014 Feb;52(2):705. PMID: 24478522 PMCID: PMC3911306


